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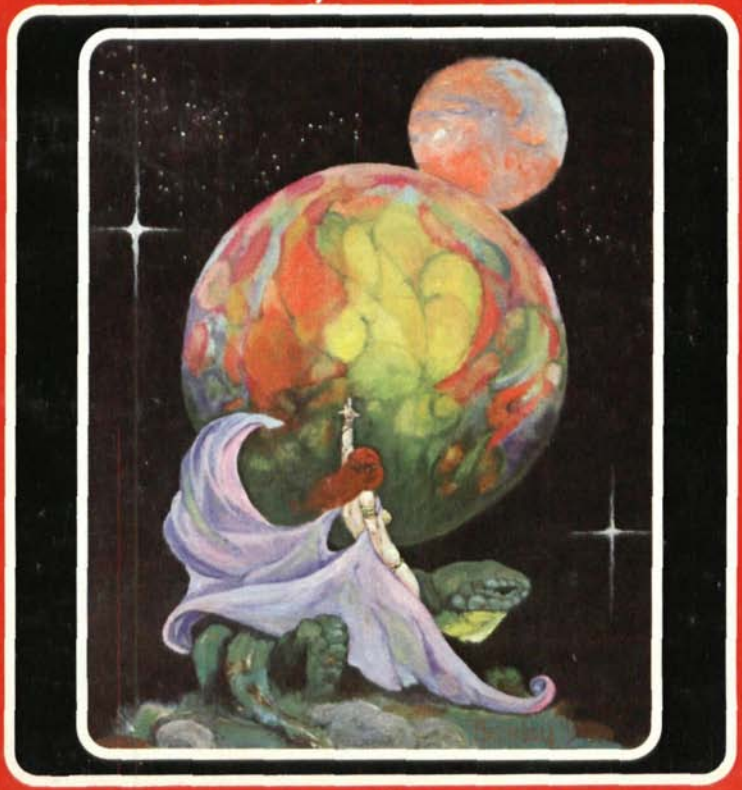

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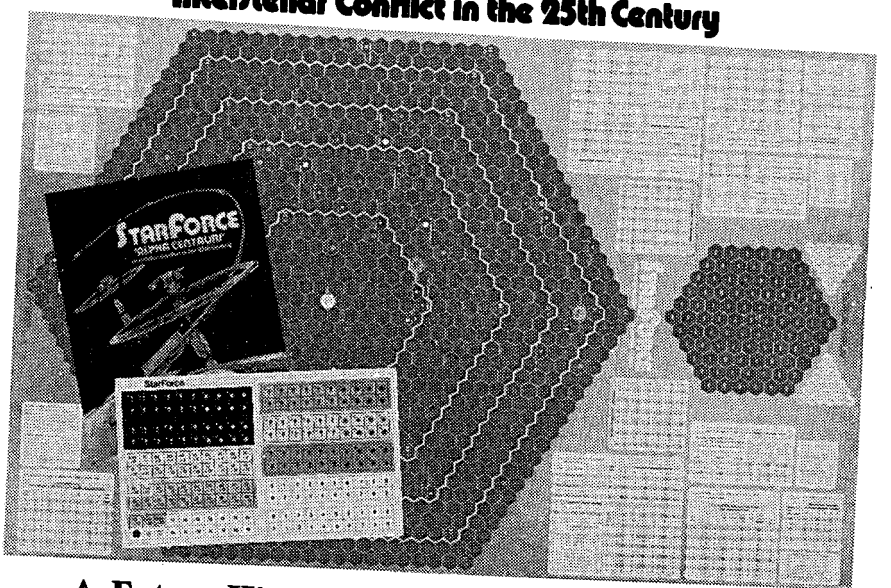


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FEBRUARY, 1977 Vol. 26, No. 1

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FANTASTIC, Vol. 26, No. 1, February 1977 is published quarterly by ULTIMATE PUBLISHING CO., INC., 69-62 230 Street, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Editorial Office: Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. $1.00 a copy. Subscription rates: One year (4 issues) United States and possessions: $4.00. Canada and Pan American Union countries and all other countries, $4.50. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions and other mail items are to be sent to Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Second Class Postage paid at Flushing, N.Y. and at additional mailing office. Copyright 1977 by Ultimate Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care; however, publisher assures no responsibility for return or safety of art work, photographs or manuscripts.

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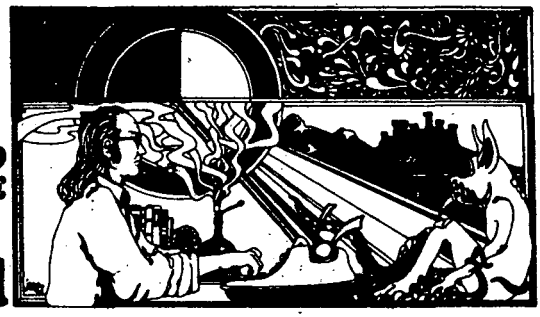
# TED WHITE editorial



APOLOGIES: Somewhere between Falls Church and our typesetter (who is in Massachusetts) the editorial I had originally written and the letter column for this issue disappeared. In the more than five years since I moved to Virginia this is the first time this has happened—which is, perhaps, a little fantastic in and of itself, considering the way the United States Postal Service is run. (I expect that in a few months or a few years a grimy, cobwebbed envelope will turn up in some postal facility and be sent to its proper, but long overdue, destination—a kind of time capsule from 1976—providing perhaps a little amusement for the recipients. . .)

In the meantime. . .No letter column this issue, and a hasty page from your overworked editor to fill in under the heading that says *Editorial.*

In the editorial I'd originally written for this spot I spent some time discussing the 1976 World Science Fiction Convention, held in Kansas City as the MidAmeriCon. I was disturbed by several aspects of what was basically an enjoyable convention.

I suppose what disturbed me most was the public display of the deceased body of Robert A. Heinlein, a man who was my first hero in science fiction. This man, more than any other single writer in our field, was responsible for the "modernization" of science fiction in the late thirties and early forties. He wrote the first (and perhaps still the best) stf "juveniles"—novels purchased by libraries for the "juvenile" section—books which could be read without shame by teenagers and adults as well as younger readers. He was, as I said in my editorial in the December issue of AMAZING, a strong influence on my own writing. My respect for the man has been considerable.

Which is why I was shocked to see his lifeless body animated by another's intelligence, moved jerkily about the convention (but always surrounded by bodyguards or "handlers" who saw that few of us came close enough to him to suspect the truth—who even cleared us out of the elevator when he used it) and brought to present a Guest of Honor "speech" which must surely have had the real Heinlein writhing in embarrassment if he was aware of it.

Copped largely from Heinlein's 1961 GoH speech at Seattle, the simulacrum masquerading as Heinlein gave a rambling, disjointed talk made up primarily of half-remembered anecdotes lacking their punchlines and climaxed by a pseudo-1950's-cold-war peroration in which he said—this is a direct quote—"You can

(cont. on page 109)



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*Willy Newbury, who made his debut here in "Algy" (August, 1976), returns to tell another story, this time about a South American–*

# THE FIGURINE

## L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

THE OFF-BLACK statuette from Guatemala was five inches high and two inches thick at its widest. It also seemed to interfere with our television reception.

This figurine represented a squatty, sexless little person, with a large, wide head on which knobs stood for ears. It had a snub nose, slitty, slanting eyes, and thick lips set in a look of cosmic disgust. It reminded me of the Billikens that decorated the homes of my parents' generation, albeit its expression was far less amiable.

The statuette had been made of a lump of either brick or red sandstone, shaped with a jackknife and a couple of files and painted black. After poking at the base with a tool, I guessed sandstone.

I got the object when, for almost the only time in our married lives, Denise and I took separate vacations. The Museum of Natural Science, in which I have a family membership, offered archaeological safaris to Central America in March and April. The Newburys wanted to look at Mayan ruins; but, with two children in high school and another in college, we did not feel we could both leave at once. While our children have been pretty good, the great youth revolt of the sixties was boiling. We had heard too many horror tales of bourgeois parents who left adolescents in charge of their houses and returned to find the houses savaged by their children's scruffy friends.

I took the first of these field trips, and Denise took the second. I won't give a travelogue, save to say that I got through without a case of the trots and was devoured by mosquitoes at Tikal while sitting in the jungle watching for wild life. There had been a yellow-fever epidemic among the monkeys, so I saw none. I did, however, smell a big cat—a puma or jaguar—in one of the so-called temples, where this feline had made its lair. It had cleared out in advance of our coming.

Our bus stopped at Sololá, by Lake Atitlán, on market day, to view the colorful crowd of Guatemalan Indians. They still wore the distinctive costumes of their villages. Some of the little brown men were in pants and some in kilts. Each, no matter how poor he looked, wore a spotless new straw sombrero. Someone must have once sold a lot of surplus nineteenth-century hussar jackets hereabouts. Many wore monkey jackets obviously copied from that pattern. They were made of coarse brown cloth, embroi-

**Illustrated by Steve Fabian**



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worn in the charge of the Light Brigade.

As we were getting off the bus, an urchin piped up: "Buy esstatues! Ancient pagan gods of Indians! Bery reasonable!"

The boy had set out a row of little uglies on the sidewalk. They sell many of these at Chichicastenango. Evidently this boy, learning that we should stop first at Sololá, meant to steal a march on his competitors. I must have looked like a good prospect, for he glued himself to me and uttered a flow of sales talk.

Much as I admired his enterprise, I remembered that Denise does not like filling the house with strange-looking souvenirs. So I fobbed the boy off with *"No ahora, gracias; mas tarde, acasa"*; and other ambiguities. Perhaps, I thought, he would have gone away when we returned to the bus.

He and most of his idols, however, were still in place. When I still declined to buy, he set up a cry: "But you promised, Meester! All Norteamericanos keep their promises!"

"Oh, all right," I said, secretly glad of an excuse to buy a souvenir of my trip. I paid a dollar for the figurine. "What's he called?"

"No name. Just ancient god."

"Well, what's your name?"

"Armando."

"Fine; this ugly little fellow shall be called Armando."

When I got home, I put Armando on the desk in my home office. Then the children began complaining of television reception. The tube was full of snow, failed to hold the vertical, and displayed other malfunctions. The service man could find nothing wrong. When the set was taken back to the shop, it worked perfectly, but repair man guessed that some neighbor might be operating a citizen's-band transmitter.

Priscille said: "It's that hideous little idol Daddy brought back from Guatemala."

"It might have a radioactive core," said Stephen.

"No," said Héloise, "because then we'd all be dying of radiation disease."

"I don't mean that," said Priscille, who seems to have an instinct for these things. "The god is sore at not getting his daily sacrifice."

"Whom would you suggest that I eviscerate with a flint knife?" I asked.

"Well, there's my geometry teacher—but I guess that isn't practical. Maybe you'd better buy a rabbit or chicken or something. If you'll hold it, I'll cut its throat in front of the idol, if you're too squeamish."

"Not over my nice oriental rugs!" cried Denise.

"You bloodthirsty little monster!" I said. "Maybe Armando will be satisfied with an offering of flowers."

"The flowers will not be out till next month, my crazy dears," said Denise.

"You could buy them from a florist," said Héloise.

"With whose money?" I said. "Look, why not use one of those wax flowers that fellow sold your mother last year? Okay, darling?"

Denise shrugged. "It is all to me equal. *Amusez-vous donc.*"

So a couple of waxen flowers were placed at the feet of Armando. At once the snow disappeared from our tube.

DENISE DEPARTED on her tour. A few days later, Carl telephoned to say that Ed and Mitch were both in town, and



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couldn't we arrange an old-time get-together?

These three and I had been cronies back in the thirties, when we were young bachelors. We used to gather for a weekly poker game—penny ante with a quarter limit, and a case of beer. It made each of us feel like a hell of a fellow.

Then came the war. Afterwards, Ed and Mitch moved to other parts. Besides, I had discovered that I did not really get so much pleasure from the game itself. It was, rather, the talk and the camaraderie that I enjoyed. One could have those without the distraction of cards.

Carl, however, urged the real old thing. Since his house was being painted, I invited the others.

On the Saturday of my party, our television set acted up again. Since I had counted upon the machine to keep my offspring out of my hair while I entertained my old pals, I was concerned. Priscille said:

"Armando's sore again, because you've left those same old wax flowers in front of him for a week without changing them."

"He's an ungrateful little spook," I said. "The wax flowers keep indefinitely, which real ones don't."

"Well, there's your evidence. You'd better take away those and give him some others."

"Oh, nonsense!" I said. "You know it was just a coincidence."

Nevertheless, when none of the children was looking, I removed the first pair of waxen blossoms and put another in their place. The television set cleared up at once.

Carl, Ed, and Mitch arrived with a quarter-century quota of bald heads and potbellies. Since I, by dint of diet and exercise, had kept my shape the best, they kidded me about my gray hair.

"My hair turned gray fifteen years ago," I said, "when I found I'd authorized a bad loan by the bank; but at least I still have it. Draw for deal."

"King deals," said Ed.

We did not argue over the form of the game, for we always played simple draw—not even five-card stud, let alone spit-in-the-ocean or other female aberrations with wild cards. We were purists who allowed nothing fancier than jack pots. The draw-poker party is one of the last stands of the heterosexual all-male social group.

On the first hand, my kings beat Mitch's jacks.

On the second, my aces and treys beat Ed's queens and fives.

On the third, Carl drew to a pair and made three tens. Since I seemed to be having an exceptional run, I drew to an inside straight. I would never do that ordinarily, having better sense; but I, too, made it.

On the fourth, I had nines up and Ed, queens over deuces. He discarded his low pair with the odd card, which is usually sound tactics, and made three queens. I dropped my odd card only and made a full house.

After a few rounds, the others had to buy more chips, even at our minuscule stakes. They looked uncomfortably at each other.

"Where have you been the last twenty-seven years, Willy?" said Ed. "Las Vegas?"

"No," said Carl. "A banker is used to carrying figures in his head. He's got all those probabilities memorized."

"No," said Mitch, "he got the dope from those statistics courses at M.I.T. He was always a pretty sharp player, and he's just refined his skills."

"Then why sit behind a desk in a bank, Willy?" asked Carl. "Wouldn't



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it be more fun and money to gamble for a living? You could have all the booze and broads you wanted—"

"Me?" I said. "Look, you guys, don't you know a banker has ice water in his veins instead of blood? I can take my booze or leave it. As for broads, I find one about all I can manage—"

"He had enough blood in his veins to get three kids," said Mitch.

"Assuming he didn't have to call in outside help," said Ed.

We went on with the game, with the same results as before. No matter who dealt, at least one of my guests had a bettable hand, while I always topped him. After a while, not wanting to be suspected of sleight-of-hand, I began losing deliberately, failing to draw when I had an improvable hand, dropping out when I had a pat hand, and folding when I would normally have called or raised.

We had our coats off. When I went out to the kitchen for more beer, I quietly rolled up my shirt sleeves. At least, they could see that I had nothing in those sleeves.

About eleven, the game died by unspoken mutual consent. I suppose they realized, as I had from the start, the futility of trying to recapture one's lost youth. Even when one goes through the same motions, the feeling is never the same.

Instead, we drank more beer and told of our careers. Having moved to California, Mitch was full of the virtues and faults of his adopted state.

"I have to go out there next month," I said. "One of our trust accounts just died, in a place called San Romano."

"I live thirty miles from there," said Mitch. "You must come and see us."

Carl put in: "Isn't that where all the college kids have been raising hell lately?"

"One of the places," said Mitch. "No worse than you've got back here. Look at Columbia—"

"Ought to machine-gun the lot," growled Ed. "Damned long-haired, loafing, dope-shooting bums—"

"I'll tell you about it when I get back," I said. "I'm staying with my brother-in-law, who's a professor there."

"Damned yellow, cowardly professors," said Ed. "Haven't the guts to can these young thugs when they act up, when they're not red revolutionists themselves. Now, when I went to college, if you presented the prexy with a list of non-negotiable demands, he'd have thrown you out the window without first opening the window."

The party ended soon after midnight. Middle-aged men are less charmed by the small hours than once they were. There were good-nights and badinage. As the other two started out the path to Carl's car, Carl turned back and quietly asked:

"Willy, tell me something. Why the hell did you drop when you had four queens? I looked at your discards."

"Must have been plain stupidity," I said. "I probably mistook them for queens and jacks."

"Don't give me that! Anyone can see you're just as sharp as ever."

"I'll try to explain some other time," I said. "It has to do with the way my television set has been acting, but it's too complicated to tell you now."

"You mean radiations from it?"

"Something like that. Good-night, Carl."

When Denise returned from her safari and I was packing for California, on an impulse I put Armando in with



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my socks. In the late thirties, I should have scorned such superstition. There was no harder-boiled materialist than I; I rejected Marxism as too mystical and not materialistic enough. But with all the funny things that have happened to me. . . .

MY BROTHER-IN-LAW is Avery Hopkins, Ph. D., professor of Middle English. He and my sister had one child, a boy of the same age as my Héloise and a student at the local college. I had not long been in the Hopkins house when I caught the tension.

"We're so worried," said Stella. She was a willowy blonde, an inch taller than Hopkins—a little round, bald man, sweet-tempered and gentle. He and Stella seemed to get along well enough. My sister continued:

"With all these demonstrations and things, you never know when the police will cut loose with their guns. Robert might be killed."

"It's the fault of the municipal government," said Hopkins. "The police shouldn't have guns. The students are only exercising their constitutional right of assembly."

"Okay," I said, "but I think the Constitution says: peaceably to assemble. When somebody heaves a rock, as usually happens, your assembly isn't peaceable any more."

"But, don't you see? If the system hadn't produced so many injustices and oppressions, there wouldn't be all this resentment to incite people to throw missiles—"

"Ever hear of a human system that didn't have injustices and oppressions? Besides, the world is full of people who, if they got to Heaven, would complain about the tune of the harps and the dampness of the clouds. And some like to throw rocks for the hell of it. Why don't you just lower the boom on young Robert? Tell him he may not, repeat not, take part in these marches and riots?"

"Oh, my!" said Hopkins. "We should never think of dealing with him by such authoritarian tactics. We don't believe in them. Besides, he's threatened to run away and become a real bum, a drifter, begging and stealing for his living."

Stella said: "You know, Willy, we always thought you were kind of a Fascist, the dictatorial way you brought up yours. Now I'm not sure."

I shrugged. "At least, they seem to be turning into hard-working squares, so we must have done something right. But now I've got to run over to the First National to see Evans."

I took the car I had rented at the airport and went to the bank, the entrance to which was flanked by a pair of big date palms. Evans, the treasurer, and the bank's lawyer met me. We three spent the afternoon going through the contents of the late Mary Trumbull Hammerstein's safe-deposit box and bank-account statements. I had to be there in person because the estate was in litigation, with a contested will and lots of money involved. A local judge had ordered the bank to turn Mrs. Hammerstein's papers over only to an official of my bank, which was the executor of the decedent's estate.

When five o'clock came, the lawyer was finished, but Evans and I still had work to do. Evans suggested that he and I come back at eight, so that we could complete the job and I could take my 'plane the next day.

Back at the Hopkinses', I met Robert Hopkins, whom I had not seen for several years. He was a small, pale, weedy, hollow-chested youth, with enough hair to qualify as the Dog-Faced Man in a circus. He



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wore clothes of such ragged denim that he might have been a castaway recently rescued from an uninhabited island.

He gave me a limp hand, saying: "Oh, yeah, you're my Uncle Willy. *Do I understand you're—like—a banker?*" He made it sound as if he were accusing me of mass murder.

"Yes," I said. "That's how I earn my living, such as it is."

He looked at me as if I had crawled out from under a flat stone and turned to his parents. "Say, when do we eat? I gotta get back to the campus. Big rally tonight."

"Please, Bob dear," said Stella. "Your father hasn't had time to serve the cocktails yet."

Robert snorted. "Okay, if you want to fool around with that middle-class crap. But I got business. Gotta eat by *six-thirty at the latest.*"

"We'll try to hurry, Robert," said Avery Hopkins, nervously pouring. "Here's yours, Willy. *Waes hail!*"

*"Drink hail!"* I responded, pleased with myself for being able to return his verbal serve. Robert was silent during our hasty cocktail hour. When Stella had served dinner, I asked him:

"What's this rally you're attending?"

"Why, the usual thing. To protest, like, this obscene, immoral war, and pollution of the ecology—"

"Excuse me, Robert," said Avery Hopkins, "but I think you mean 'pollution of the *environment.*' '*Ecology*' is the science of the environment, not the environment itself."

"Oh, who cares, Dad? Anyway, we're gonna protest pollution and racism and Fascism and sexism and capitalism and imperialism and grading and intelligence tests and—"

When Robert paused for breath, I said: "That's a pretty broad spectrum of complaints. Don't you think you'd get further if you concentrated on one thing at a time?"

"Oh, you wouldn't understand, Uncle Willy. You're on the other side of the barricades from us."

"*Some of my banking friends consider me a bright pinko liberal,*" I said mildly.

"Oh, that's worse than a real conservative! You guys are always trying to damp down the class conflict, but we gotta have class struggle if we're ever gonna smash the system. We need it to raise the revolutionary consciousness of the masses. I mean, like, you may be a decent sort of guy in your private life, but you belong to the oppressing class. Also, you're an old man past forty, so you just couldn't understand us young progressive types. Might as well be talking Greek."

"Well," I said, "I have at least read Marx's *Capital*. Have you?"

"Marx? Naw. He's not relevant any more. The Communists have become, like, just another bunch of bureaucratic squares. All they want is to take over the system and run it for their own benefit. But we gotta overthrow the system, smash it to pieces, and start over. Now if you'd read Marcuse—"

"I have; that is, one of his books."

"What ja think?"

"I thought it the worst lot of rhetorical balderdash since *Mein Kampf*. All about how Man wants this and needs that and ought to do the other thing. He throws around a lot of abstractions having no connections with the real world—with what any real man or group of men wants—"

As I spoke, Robert became more and more excited. Now he jumped up from his half-eaten dinner, shouting:

"All right, we'll show you old



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mother-fuckers! We'll get you, like we got that reactionary sociologist! You're all parts of the system that's grinding down the people. You talk about our violence, but you use violence against us all the time, like sending your Fascist pig cops to beat us up! You're too yellow to do your own dirty work, so you hire the pigs to do it! Well, fuck the system, and fuck you, too!"

He slammed out, leaving Avery, Stella, and me staring. It was one of the more uncomfortable moments of my life. Avery Hopkins muttered:

"Willy, I can't tell you how sorry I am that you should be subjected to such barbarous discourtesy—"

"My fault, I'm afraid," I said. "I should have shut up instead of needling him."

After groveling apologies all around, I asked: "Who was the reactionary sociologist?"

"Oh," said Hopkins, "he meant Vincent Rosso, the one who had his office blown up. Lost his right foot and all his scientific data."

"I read something about that in the Eastern papers. What was his offense?"

"He believed in heredity, so that made him a racist, an imperialist, and other dreadful things."

AFTER I HAD helped with the dishes, I collected the things I needed for the evening session at the bank. Looking at Armando, lying amid my socks, I thought: if you ever need supernatural help, Wilson Newbury my lad, now is the time, with a horde of young idealists on the rampage. I put the statuette in my brief case.

Evans awaited me in front of the First National. The watchman, a white-haired ex-cop named Joshua, let us in.

After another hour, we were just wrapping up the transfer of the Hammerstein papers to my custody. We worked in an inner office, so as not to be seen through the picture windows. It has always seemed foolish to me to build large expanses of glass into the walls of a bank, which ought if anything to resemble a medieval fortress. But the First National of San Romano was some architect's dream, with vast panes of plate glass outside and fancy wooden paneling within.

Joshua knocked on the door. When told to enter, he came in with Robert Hopkins, the latter breathing hard. The watchman said:

"Mr. Newbury, is this your nephew? Says he's Professor Hopkins's son."

"Yes, Josh, he is. What's up?"

"There's a big crowd outside, making a holler. So this young man came to the door and asked me to let him in. He wants to warn you."

"Yes, Bob?"

"Uncle Willy! You and Mr. Evans better split. The comrades are gonna destroy this symbol of repression, and if you're inside—well, I'm sorry I blew my top. Like, I didn't mean I really wanted to see you fried alive."

"Good God!" said Evans. "I'll call the cops."

"Won't do any good," said Robert. "The fuzz are already out there, but they're not doing anything. You guys better get the hell out while you can."

"That damned city council!" said Evans. "They told the police to handle the students with the utmost restraint, because they didn't want any more of the bad publicity the town got from last February's bust. Let's go."

I quickly stuffed the remaining papers into my brief case. We had hardly left the inside office when a



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terrific crash came from the front. At once the crowd noises, which had been barely audible in the office, became loud.

Joshua opened the door to the foyer and stepped through. There was a dull impact, and he staggered back. He had lost his uniform cap, and blood ran down his scalp. A brick had hit him. Bottles, bricks, stones, and pieces of concrete were raining into the foyer through the picture windows, most of whose glass lay in fragments on the tiled floor. One of the date palms by the entrance was burning briskly.

"Keep back!" said Evans. "It's suicide to step out there."

"Has this place a back door?" I asked.

"Yes. Let's try it."

When we came to the back door, however, it transpired that it had to be opened by two keys, and Joshua had only one of them. None of the others on his ring fitted. After Joshua had fumbled in a dazed sort of way, Evans took the keys from him and tried them with no more success. The door was a solid affair, with a steel frame and small panes of laminated glass, so we could not hope to batter our way out. I said:

"If we went back to the front and put out the inside lights, so they couldn't see us to aim, we might make a break."

Robert Hopkins, looking as if he were about to faint, staggered after us. When we got to the foyer again and put out the lights, the rain of missiles continued. The floor was ankle deep in stones, bricks, and broken glass. I do not know where the rioters got such an inexhaustible supply.

With the lights out, we could see our assailants. About a third or a quarter were girls, and all were in the ragged garb that symbolized rejection of bourgeois values. They formed a loose semicircle in front of the bank. Off to the left I saw the gleam of brass buttons, but the police stood idly by.

To escape, we should have to bull our way through the line. While throwing things, the rioters chanted some slogan, which, after a while, I made out to be: "*Fuck the system! Fuck the system*!"

"Oh, boy," snarled Evans, "if I only had a machine gun and plenty of ammo!"

Little flames appeared in the ragged line. One of the flames soared up in a parabola and struck the outside of the building. There was a burst of yellow flame.

"Fire bombs," I said.

Another gasoline-filled bottle, with a lighted wick, sailed sparkling through the air. This one came in through one of the gaping picture windows and spread its flame around the foyer. Papers and curtains began to burn.

"Now we'll be roasted for sure," said Evans. "I said there was too much goddam wood in this building. What'll we do?"

Another Molotov cocktail whizzed into the building. The heat became oppressive, and the smoke made us cough. Beyond the flames, I saw firemen wheel up a truck and run a hose out to a hydrant. No sooner had they attached it, however, than several students attacked it with axes and machetes and soon had it in shreds. The firemen retreated from the shower of missiles.

"Goddam cops!" breathed Evans. "Look at 'em, standing back and just watching! They're afraid to do anything, because then every pinko jour-



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nalist in the country will tell how the brutal Fascist pigs killed some innocent children who were just having fun."

"We'll have to take our chance and run through the fire and rocks and everything," said Robert Hopkins, shivering. "Maybe, if I yell I'm one of them, they'll let us through."

Crash! went the missiles, while the flames flashed and crackled.

"Just a second," I said. I stepped aside, turned my back, and fished Armando out of my case.

"Armando," I muttered, "if you get us out of this with whole skins, I'll sacrifice a rabbit to you."

Hardly had I spoken when there was a brighter flash and a deafening crash of thunder. It seemed to come from right overhead. In my part of the country, when that happens, you look out to see if a nearby tree has been struck by lightning. Then came a terrific downpour, with more lightning and thunder.

The idealists scattered in all directions. The firemen attached another hose. A couple ran up and sprayed the gasoline fires with chemicals, while others hosed down the outside of the building and then the foyer. Coming out, we got hosed, too, and emerged dripping, coughing, and sputtering. I did not mind, even though it meant leaving San Romano a day late.

As a Northeasterner, I was used to thunderstorms. I did not then realize that, in most of California, they are so rare that when one occurs, people telephone radio stations to ask if there has been an earthquake. Therefore it was not surprising that the mob dissolved quickly in the face of this strange meteorological assault.

Young Robert was subdued as I drove him home; fortunately nobody had thought to burn my car. Perhaps he learned something from the experience.

THAT, HOWEVER, was not the end of the tale of Armando. When I got home, I put the statue back on my desk. At once our television set acted up again. Placing waxen flowers in front of the statue did no good.

When the real flowers burst into bloom, I tried a sprig of forsythia on Armando, and then some lilacs and azaleas. The television set still balked, nor could the service man fix it. Priscille said:

"Daddy, he's mad about something. What did you do to stir him up?"

I thought. "Come to think of it, when we were trapped in that burning bank building, I promised to sacrifice a rabbit to him if he'd save us. He did, but I haven't made the sacrifice."

"Then we've got to give it to him or do without the TV. Go buy us a rabbit. I'll help you kill it."

"Damned if I will! No five-inch piece of rock is going to tell me what to do."

The television remained out of action. In addition, we had a run of accidents and petty disasters. I sprained my ankle at my regular Sunday morning game of tennis and limped for a fortnight. Our lawn tractor broke down. So did our clothes washer, our electric stove, our dishwasher, our vacuum cleaner, and our furnace. The Buick developed a flat. It was a revolt of the robots.

I decided to take the statue to the archaeology department of the Museum of Natural Science. I told an archaeologist there, Jack O'Neill, how I had come by the figurine, adding:

"I was sure it was a modern fake, or I wouldn't have bought it. I don't



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want to encourage clandestine digging. But I do want to know what I've got."

"Leave it here a few days," said O'Neill. When I went back the following week, he said: "This is a funny one, Mr. Newbury. On your time scale, it's a real antique; but on mine, it's a modern fake."

"How do you mean?"

"All our tests—chemical, fluorescent, and so on—indicate that this thing was made about the mid nineteenth century. It's a common pattern. I can show you dozens, almost identical, in our storage vaults.

"The catch is that the originals were made in pre-Columbian times. In the sixteenth century, the Spanish forcibly converted the Quiché peoples to Catholic Christianity, so the making of these idols stopped. It was revived in the present century as a means of making a fast quetzal off the tourists. Some peasants dig up the original molds used in casting the ancient figurines and cast new statues in them."

"That would make the new casts only fifty per cent fake," I said.

O'Neill smiled. "It's better than having them dig up the real old ones and ruin them as evidence. But in the nineteenth century, Guatemala had been Christian for four centuries, while on the other hand there weren't enough tourists to furnish a market."

"Do you suppose some pre-Conquest cult had survived in the hills and continued to make these things?"

He shrugged. "Maybe. Or perhaps some enterprising Quiché farmer made it to sell to John Lloyd Stephens or Zelia Nuttall or one of their successors, when archaeologists began poking around the Mayan ruins in the last century." O'Neill looked thoughtful. "Would you sell this?"

"I don't know. For how much?"

"A thousand dollars."

But for my banking experience, I might have started and shouted "*What*?" A thousand is a nice, round sum, even in these inflated days, especially when the statue had cost me one dollar. But experience has made me cautious.

"Really?" I said. "Is it worth that to the Museum?"

O'Neill seemed to go through an internal struggle. "It's not the Museum," he said at last. "It's a private party, who came to us a few days ago for help in tracing his statue. He says it was stolen from him. He traced it to Sololá and learned that one of your group had bought it last March. He didn't know which, but he posted this reward and promised the Museum a donation if we'd help him locate his idol."

"Who is this man?"

"Agustín Flores Valera, a Guatemalan."

"Where is he now?"

"Back in Guatemala, but he left word for us to cable him."

"Why does he want it so badly?"

"He's a professional gambler; says it's his good-luck charm. Silly of him, but I don't see why we shouldn't help him out at that price."

"I'll think about it," I said, putting the statue back in my brief case.

I took Armando home and thought. I had nothing against Señor Flores, although his occupation was not one that our bank would consider a good credit risk. He had doubtless figured out how to butter up Armando so as to make the cards shuffle, the dice roll, and the roulette ball drop just right. It was hardly fair to his opponents, but I have never had much sympathy for the victims of gambling



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sharks. If they were not trying to get something for nothing, they would not expose themselves to being taken.

If I kept Armando, I should have to give him his promised sacrifice. Otherwise he would keep on sending us bad luck. If I yielded to him, he might throw some good luck my way; but he would also want more of the same. I could imagine what it would do to the Harrison Trust Company if the story got out that the vice-president was performing pagan blood sacrifices in the dark of the moon. Before the war, when I was a young engineering graduate, desperately job hunting, I would have taken Armando to my bosom, sacrifices and all. Now, however, things were different.

I WAS STILL pondering the problem a week later when, one rainy Sunday afternoon, my doorbell rang. Stephen called:

"Man to see you, Dad."

The man, small and dark, introduced himself as Agustín Flores Valera. I showed him into my home office and seated him.

"It is a great pleasure, a great honor, to meet you, sir," he said, bouncing in his chair. "You have a beautiful place, a beautiful wife, beautiful children. I am overwhelmed. I am enchanted."

"Very kind of you," I said. "I suppose you've come about that statue?"

"Ah, yes indeed. I see him there on your desk. The good Doctor O'Neill tells me that he has explained the circumstances to you? A great scientist, a great man, Doctor O'Neill."

"Well, Señor Flores?"

"You know my offer?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you prepared to accept?"

"Not yet. I want more time to think it over."

"Oh, please, Mister, I need my esstatue now. In my business, one needs all the luck one can get. I am on my way to the casinos at Puerto Rico. . . . Look. I tell you. I have here another esstatue of the same kind. Genuine antique, not a modern fake."

Flores whisked out an idol much like mine. When he set it beside Armando, it took a second look to tell them apart.

"There you are, Mister," he said. He was standing at my desk and leaning over me. He had the Latin American habit of getting within inches of the person one is talking to, and he had a breath that would knock over a buffalo.

"You will never miss the one you have now," he went on. "Besides, I have here one thousand in cash." From another pocket, he produced a wad of hundreds and flapped them in my face. "Come! It is a deal, no?"

Although he had not done anything really offensive, I disliked Señor Flores more and more. Before he arrived, I had almost decided to let him have Armando; but the hard sell always gets my back up. I run into that sort of thing all the time from promoters and developers who want to try out some grand scheme on our depositors' money. I said:

"No, sorry. I want more time to think this over."

"How about fifteen hundred? I can go that high."

"No, Señor, I meant what I said. I am not yet prepared to sell. *Mas tarde, puede ser.*"

"Oh, you esspeak the Esspanish! Excellent! One can see that you are a man of great culture. But now really, Mr. Newbury, I must have that esstatue, now. Do not make it difficult for us. I will even offer two



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thousand."

I sighed. "Señor Flores, I have said my say, and that's that. When I've had time to think it over, if you will write me, I'll give you an answer."

He stood for a minute with tight lips. I could see a vein in his temple throb and thought he was about to burst into a tirade. He controlled himself, however, put away the money and the substitute statue, and said:

"Bery well, Mr. Newbury, I will not take more of your time. Perhaps we will be in touch again soon. Pray convey my compliments to the beautiful Mrs. Newbury and the beautiful Newbury children. A pleasant good day to you, Mister."

He bowed formally and went. As he disappeared into the waiting taxi, Priscille called from inside:

"Hey, Daddy, the TV's working again!"

So it was. Struck by a thought, I went back to my office and picked up Armando. Only it was not Armando. It was the near-duplicate that Flores had placed beside my statue.

This one, as I soon ascertained by digging through the black paint, was made of gray clay, not red sandstone. Moreover, it had been cast in a mold—one could see the parting lines—and finished by filing, instead of being sculptured from solid stone. Flores had shuffled the two on my desk and coolly picked up mine. I should have known better than to let a professional gambler work his sleight-of-hand on me.

What hurt the most was the two thousand, which, had I not let a petty personal dislike sway my actions, I could have had for the asking.

I never heard of Flores Valera again, nor did the Museum receive his promised donation. I have often wondered: was Armando so eager to get someone to make a blood sacrifice to him that he engineered his own abduction? Did his new possessor submit to his demands? If the gambler balked, Armando was in a position to ruin him by a few bum steers.

I sometimes miss the ugly face of my little Quiché godlet, but perhaps it is just as well he is gone. In financial transactions and human relationships, I find it hard enough to estimate the most favorable probabilities, without having also to take into account the whims of a bloodthirsty and temperamental deity!

—L. Sprague de Camp

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*Brian Stableford, whose "Science Fiction: A Sociological Perspective" (March, 1974) marked his first appearance in these pages, returns with a very contemporary kind of fantasy, a—*

# JUDAS STORY

## BRIAN M. STABLEFORD

### Illustrated by Tony Gleeson

HOW DO YOU FEEL about Jack Queen King?

You love him?

Well then, listen to me for a few minutes.

No, I'm not trying to steal a bit of the big gold rush. I'm not selling tears. This is the truth, and I'm giving it away. And besides, I—for one—think that you're wasting a hell of a lot of good tears. How many tears can Jack possibly *need*, quite apart from the question of how many he deserves?

What gives me the right to be telling you a story you don't want to hear?

Well, take a look at your photographs and posters of Jack Queen King. Have you, perchance, got one which is taken from a little further back than six feet from his fly buttons? One which shows some of what goes on *behind* Jack's pretty face and his Ace of Hearts guitar? Take that one out of the stack. There's probably a guy standing on the left of your beloved, four or five discreet paces back of him. He's tall and sleepy-faced, and he looks as if he doesn't quite belong; which is why eighty per cent of the pics cut him in half with the side of the frame. That's John Joe Hope. He was Jack's bass player. Right in back, sandwiched in between Jack and John Joe, you'll be able to see a big, shiny mountain of drums. If the focus is sharp on Jack then you won't be able to see much of me. But there might be a dull grey blur or a pair of phantom hands attached to drumsticks. Rest assured—I'm in there somewhere. My name doesn't matter, and it doesn't sound anything like what they call me, which is Clay.

John Joe and I backed Jack King for nearly two years. From the bottom rung of the ladder to the top. Whenever you heard him play, we were behind him.

Now the first thing I want to make clear is that I'm not claiming any credit for the success of Jack Queen King. There's not a shred of your affection that I want to take away from him. He can have it all. I want *none* of it. I was there, that's all. There's not a single atom of Jack Queen King's music that you can blame on me.

At the same time, I'm saying nothing about or for John Joe Hope. He can tell his own story. This is mine and mine only.



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THE FIRST TIME I saw Jack Queen King he made a very strong impression on me—as an untalented out-and-out bastard. It was no surprise. In our business, every guy on the road will cut your throat if you're cutting into his slice of the loaf. Which we all were. There are only so many third rate spots for a hell of a lot of third rate outfits.

Jack was playing solo in those days—mostly common-or-garden blues, some Dylan and some lukewarm rock thrown in to try and cater to all kinds of tastelessness. They stuck him in our dressing room because they didn't have any spare, and they figured he wouldn't take up much space.

He was on first, playing to the crowd while their minds were more on getting canned, stoned and paired-off than blowing their minds in a sweaty bop-session. We didn't want to hear him, but they had the p/a turned up far too loud and the walls were like cardboard, so we had no option. He was pretty much of a dead loss. We didn't even notice when he deserted his pattern towards the end of the pitch and stuck in a couple of his own numbers. But he came back looking cool and far from unhappy, and he told us how well his own stuff had gone down compared to the standards. We said yeah, and great, and how were they, and he got a little uptight because we weren't even listening to what he was saying, but just making habit-noises. But we had no time for Jack Queen King in his self-elected role as God's gift to rock. We were nervy—especially Pete Candler, whose fingers hadn't worked too well since they put him on downers to break him of a speed habit and he'd got hooked on slow-time instead. He wasn't an addict, just a bit of a wreck.

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But he'd been part of the group since before my time, and it wasn't for me to suggest we get a new lead.

The one thing that stuck in my mind about Jack Queen King before that gig was that when he changed his jacket he took something out of the breast pocket and flipped it on the floor. It was a playing card—the four of clubs.

He saw me looking. "Carry it for luck," he said, absently. "Never use the same one twice." And he took out a thinned-down pack, peeled the blind card off the top, and stuck it into the pocket of his working-coat.

"Don't you look to see what it is?" Marna asked him. Marna was our vocalist.

"Never," he said. I thought even then—for no particular reason—that he was a damn liar.

We went on and did our usual performance. Solid rock with just enough bounce—lots of effort, lots of crude noise. Lots of fun for the people out front if they were simple-minded enough not to compare us too closely to what they *really* liked. Mostly, they appreciated us—if they hadn't, they wouldn't book us. We were no secret by now—we seemed to have been touring the third class circuit for the best part of our lives. We were all trading on our illusions about how good we might be or how much we liked the life or how long it would be before a better bandwagon rolled close by.

Up on the stage you can't hear a damn thing and you can't see much because of the fancy lighting, so you mostly concentrate on what your hands are doing and don't try to get out into the crowd. John Joe really does play gigs with his eyes shut. Occasionally, though, my mind tends to wander into the auditorium, and I try to figure what they're thinking about and what our music is doing to them. I don't try to look at them, because it's not possible. But I let myself go out there a bit, and I get this vague picture of flapping bodies and an occasional pair of staring eyes which remind me that I'm a freak in a great big goldfish bowl. I don't mind that much. A drummer has his drums to hide him. And Marna was the one who really felt the eyes—the hungry eyes and the glassy eyes.

*That* night, though, I caught two eyes that I knew belonged to Jack Queen King, and he wasn't busy getting a charge from Marna's sweaty legs and flopping tits. He was watching *all* of us, from *all* the angles. I don't know exactly what I saw or how I knew, but Jack Queen King was out there and he was drinking us in. And it made me shiver.

It was past closing time when we came off, but our ever-faithful manager had laid in a supply so we could drown our inadequacies to our heart's content. I was hoping that Jack Queen King might have pulled a disappearing act, but he was still hanging around in the dressing-room. After a gig, Pete and Marna liked to talk, and the others humoured them. But I liked to have a quiet word with myself alone, perhaps aided by a bottle or two. So it was easy for Jack to corner me.

"I like the way you play the drums," he said, sounding about as friendly to my buzzing ears as a rattlesnake.

"Thanks," I said.

"Seems to me, though," he said, "that you could do with a little more *attack*."

"I play drums, not machine-guns," I told him, "and I sure as hell don't need you to tell me how."



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He could hardly have failed to get the message, but he didn't care.

"The bass player and you," he said, "you got something worth keeping. The rest is rubbish. When you break up, I might be interested in making a deal. I want to change my act—switch over to my stuff and jack in the shit that everybody pulls."

"We're all right," I told him, emphatically. "We aren't breaking up. We do okay."

"Come off it," he said. "That lead guitar could play itself better. That guy isn't fit to cross a road. How much longer do you think he can last?"

"Pete's okay," I said, and I stood up to move away and start packing up to leave. But he stood in my way a moment longer while he finished his say.

"You remember, brother," he said. "If that lead man steps under a bus, you got an interested party right here. You and the bass man and Jack Queen King. We can do something, see?"

He was a lot bigger than I was, but I grabbed his arms and I was ready to throw him out of my way. The moment I touched him, though, he moved, quick and easy, and ushered me past with a flip of his hand.

"Fuck off," I said. He collected his gear and left.

Six days later some lunatic let Pete loose at the wheel of a car, and he ran it straight up the front of an articulated lorry. They had to scrape him up off the motorway with a fish-slice.

YOU FIGURE I could have steered clear of my conscience and Jack Queen King at one and the same time?

Maybe you're right, but hell, a few bitter words in a worldful of bitter facts just didn't seem that important. The business is full of guys I can't stand the sight of. I've worked with a dozen or more in my time. I like beating the skins and at my rates I can't afford to stop for long without going back to being a milkman. I'm no man of means and the Social Security don't figure me as a worthy cause. The breaks of the business are my bread and butter, and you know how these things go.

One thing I held out for and one only, in order to try and save my pride. I insisted that Jack took Marna along with John Joe and me. John Joe agreed that we couldn't leave her in the lurch, and between us we managed to put it over on Jack. Jack didn't think that anyone could handle his lyrics except Jack Queen King, and the weeks we put into learning the new style and rehearsing seemed to illustrate his point perfectly. Marna could sing as well as any other cheap warbler, but Jack Queen King's songs were threaded through and through with sarcasm and accusation and plain, simple hatred, and she hadn't a cat in hell's chance of carrying things like that. They simply weren't her scene at all. But I was prepared to argue, and Jack knew it. He and I were already having our differences. He wanted *attack* in his beat, just like he'd said before, and I was slow in delivering. I'd been playing bouncy-bouncy with the sticks for a good many years, and it wasn't really in me to go at them like I was trying to beat the shit out of my ugliest enemy.

Anyhow, Jack let things go pretty easy while we were warming up to the big day when we could go back on the road. He seemed content that we were getting his foul-minded songs into our systems, and he didn't try to push too hard. I kidded myself



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that it would all work out okay enough for us to pay our way and support ourselves in the miserable manner to which we'd become accustomed.

The night that we first went on stage with Jack Queen King was the night I stopped kidding. John Joe was at his turgid, fanatic best. Jack, for the first time, looked way out of the rock-bottom class. I put a lot of crash and bang into the hammers, but I could feel that my performance was still short of the guts which we needed. Brute force and ignorance wasn't enough—Jack's music needed *real* violence—viciousness and anger and hate—and I just hadn't got it.

And on top of that, Marna was a grade A catastrophe. After just one song, Jack moved in on the mike with her, and I just *couldn't* blame him. Jack had invested a lot of his time and his sweat into making those lyrics what he wanted them to be. He'd wasted a lot of words trying to make Marna understand them when he knew all the time that she couldn't get near them. He'd improved John Joe's bass beyond all recognition and he'd tried to make me into what he needed. I'd known that he was trying to make me fight, trying to set me up, and I'd resisted. He hadn't forced me—maybe because he knew that I'd catch on as soon as we started in for real.

It was deadly.

We went down like a lead-loaded lifebelt. Even with Jack singing loud and deep-throated, Marna somehow contrived to throw the whole thing away. Her weakness contaminated the whole session. So did mine. I was the foundations, she was the roof. Neither of us had what it took. I honestly hadn't realized in rehearsal that we were anything more than a second-rate rock machine. But on stage, with real people listening, I knew that we were trying to be something much bigger than that, and because we were failing we were shoving across a load of utter crap.

The audience didn't hold it against us too much. Tasteless audiences are prepared to hear tasteless music. They appreciate competence, but they don't vilify bad play—they just don't care that much. We got more than our fair share of lacklustre applause.

Then Jack exploded. At last.

He ranted at John Joe for getting lost—which was maybe a little unfair—and he ranted at me for never getting there at all. I expected to take the big part of the hammer, but I was wrong. He wasted only a couple of minutes on me before he swung on Marna. That was a massacre.

I was very slow to react. You're always slow after a spot. The noise beats up your ears so much your brain gets numb.

Also, I thought she could take it. Marna was a hard girl. She'd jerked a good many tears in her time—including a lot of Pete Candler's, and some of mine. I knew that there was a sort of something between Marna and Jack King, and I'd suspected it was more her side than his. But that was nothing new either, and it had never hurt her before.

But this time it was different. Jack was all set to take Marna apart. It was deliberate and premeditated—the hatchet job to end all hatchet jobs, timed when she was so sick at heart she couldn't take it. It had never struck me before what kind of a man Jack would have to be inside himself in order to write his kind of music. It struck me then.

First, I was amazed—amazed that



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anything could crease Marna so fast, so hard and so much. Then, I was appalled—appalled at what happened to Marna, who cracked up right in front of me, who lost her plastic-pretty face and her baby-brittle mind in the space of ten or fifteen minutes. Finally, I was frightened—frightened of what Jack had done and what Jack might one day do again. He cut Marna out. Right out.

Hours later, I realised that he had killed her.

I took her home, I tried to talk to her, I tried to listen to her, and all the time, I was getting this feeling stronger and stronger that I was in the presence of something dead. She was walking and talking, but she was dead inside. She had been written clean out of Jack Queen King's existence, but she loved him, with a horrible, total love that left her *nothing* for herself. She was dead. I thought she might recover. I was a fool.

Later still, in the very early hours of the morning, John Joe Hope showed me what he had salvaged from Jack's waste-basket. Two cards—the ace and queen of spades.

He offered them to me without comment, but I knew what he meant. They were death cards. Jack Queen King had carried Marna's execution around with him all day.

We had a little talk, John Joe and I. We agreed finally to chalk it up to the breaks of the business. It's a cruel world, we said. You never can tell who's going to take the big crunch next, we said. Who could have known that Marna would fall apart at the seams like that, we said. Poor Jack must be feeling as guilty as hell, we said.

Poor Jack!

Poor us. Marna had just ceased to be a fully paid up member of the human race. She'd be a tourist in the land of the living until the day she decided that the joke was over. And we found some sympathy for Jack Queen King. It occurs to me now that that's exactly the sort of thing Jack wrote lyrics about. Blindness to the truth. Misdirected sympathy. The savage cruelty of the puppet-master which tells us the way to think and protects us from believing.

YOU'VE ALL HEARD the story of how we sprang to fame overnight.

Well, that's a lie too.

Once Jack had taken over lead vocal, we looked exactly the same as what we eventually became, nineteen months later. We did the same songs and we had the same style. We got a lot better, with practice, but the difference wasn't spectacular—not half so spectacular as the difference which we saw over our first few performances, which had nothing to do with practice, but a lot to do with attitude.

What had happened to Marna set me a fine example. I swear that it *wasn't* fear in case the same thing happened to me that made me into what Jack wanted. That incident was responsible, all right, but only in that it hardened me considerably. I didn't hate Jack Queen King at that point, but I was prepared to *attack* him. I was prepared to put my heart and soul into battering those drums as if I was committing murder. I was even prepared to imagine that I was getting a thrill out of the murder angle. I'd changed, you see. No more bounce and easy going. I still enjoyed playing drums, but the source of the enjoyment was new. I was *committed*—not just to hammering the skins, but also to what I hammered out—Jack King's songs and Jack King's style. The



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music which would sweep us to fame. Eventually.

You can still hear that music. Even now. It's immortalized in black plastic. Put one of our records on, and listen to it carefully. Now tell me: is that good rock or isn't it?

But the rock on the record isn't more than a tiny fraction of the real story. By *no* means.

Nobody leaps to stardom in ten days flat.

We were second-rate, remember? We were playing in cellars and wood huts and the cheapest of clubs. We had our musical feet six inches deep in the musical shit. Nobody *leaps* out of that. There's *no* way out except to crawl. Nobody knew us. Nobody *wanted* to know us. Each step of the ladder takes time and effort and cash. The rock which we had to offer was good, but it didn't sound so much better on black plastic than half a hundred other groups who were recently graduated from the shit-circuit. You may rave over those discs, but that's because you've been told to, or taught to. Where *we* were—the real power of Jack Queen King—was in our live performance. It was in Jack's voice and Jack's person, and the *shape* of the noise which Jack Queen King had made us produce.

I never thought that maybe the audiences were digging us just a little too much, that they were getting more out of us than had any right to be there to be got. What performer would think like that? They thought we were great. I thought it was great that they thought we were great. Who'd ask questions?

And as time went by, even all-out attack became simply a way of doing things. The habit was built into my system. I found myself with time to look out of the drumstack at John Joe, and at Jack King. I found myself with a little attention to spare, that I could use for thinking. I found myself wondering which card Jack was carrying. I found myself reaching out into the sound-space where the people were, just as I used to do in the old days. And I found myself beginning to pick up some of Jack's lyrics, delivered Jack's way with our help. I began to get some idea of what we sounded like.

Slowly, it began to dawn.

I never listen to lyrics. I don't suppose many other people do, either. What the words *say*, when they're written down, is usually pretty meaningless and almost invariably irrelevant. What matters in a lyric is where you put the emphasis, and which words you support with which kind of sound. The guitar obliterates some words, puts power into others. What matters about lyrics is how they *feel*. And Jack Queen King, singing *live* could give his lyrics a feel that was absolutely new.

Let's briefly review your career as a Jack Queen King fan. The first time you heard him on the radio it was just rock music, right? It took two or three times of hearing before you picked up the title of the disc and the name of the artist. "Black Star Children" by Jack Queen King. Heavy beat, words with the right hint at meaning, the right element of aggression and nastiness to appeal to your young and hungry mind. You began to listen closer, and you liked it. It didn't put your soul on ice, but it had you interested enough to want to see him.

And he was cheap and easy to see. We were on the road, playing every date we could, fighting for recognition, angling for the big time. Our price was going up in little jerks as



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our record climbed into the charts and began to accelerate on its way to the top. You heard that Jack was the greatest in the flesh—far better than in plastic. You caught a few tracks of the long player. You were keen, you were really looking forward to a good time. You were just looking to be hooked, weren't you? You wanted a new idol, because the last one was developing rust. You wanted a new talking point. You wanted to get a real charge out of Jack Queen King. You were looking to love him, to be knocked out by him, to be taken over by him.

You were a pushover. A real pushover. What surprises me now is not so much that Jack Queen King stole your soul, but that you still had it to lose.

I REMEMBER JACK walking offstage, reaching into his pocket, and taking out the Jack of Diamonds. It was the first Jack I'd seen him carry. He tore it up and he was smiling all the time like the goddamned cheshire cat.

"*Diamonds*," he said. "That's *money*. We've done our time, now. The money's going to take us up from here. Up like a rocket."

And he was right.

How could he be wrong?

We weren't in any hurry to cut a follow-up disc to "Black Star Children." Jack's attitude to the singles market was lukewarm. He thought that we could afford to fancy ourselves and our music a little bit more than that. He knew we could sell records and he wasn't averse to making money, but he thought the records went to a totally mindless public. Their money was good, but they didn't turn him on the way that the crowds who came to watch us did.

And so we stayed on the road, hammering ourselves at a tremendous pace. The price of our heads skyrocketed, but Jack kept it down to a level which wouldn't leave us short of dates. I think he forced our ever-loving manager to make a couple of cheap deals which that worthy gentleman would never otherwise have touched in a month of Sundays.

Like I said, I knew that something was happening, because I could feel it too—not only in the lyrics, but in the whole shape of the music. But I was drunk for a while on drums and success, and I didn't really know what it felt *like*, only that it felt. I looked at the people and watched them feel, but I couldn't understand. In time, though, just as the fury had worn down to habit, so the intoxication drained away and left me a little bit cold, and made me take a sudden sharp glance around at where and what and how we were.

The night I found out there were a couple of thousand out front. It was a big crowd by any standards—there aren't a lot of places you can get that many indoors without them being stacked three deep. Before we went on, Jack was jittery with elation, shouting about how good we were going to be, and how much they'd love us. Jack always needed them to love us. John Joe was taciturn, as he always was, but I remember his making some dour comment about Jack carrying the queen of hearts in his top pocket, which made Jack mad. He didn't like jokes about his cards—he was still adamant that he never looked at them in advance. And I *still* thought he was a liar.

We went out on stage.

And we played.

And they loved us. In a manner of speaking.

I was stone cold. The hatred and



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the violence and the bloodlust was all coming out of the drums, but it was in my hands by now. My head was a million miles away. I guess all that stuff had to be in my heart as well, or it could never have got into my hands, and for that matter I guess it's still there now, but it was so deep set there that it didn't give me any pain or put any kind of a bite on my mind. It was cold inside my head.

And I looked at the kids who had come to see us. I reached out way beyond the cage of lights, and even tried to double back. I tried to be with them—I tried to feel what they were feeling. I got inside the expressions on their faces.

You know those expressions. You've seen them at the concerts. You've seen them on the TV. Adoration, you think? Idolatry?

You're wrong.

Those faces are the faces of people whose souls are being ripped right out from inside them. Those masks of love are shaped and painted by *death*.

Jack Queen King was *killing* those people.

Killing them inside, just like he'd killed Marna. He had the power, did Jack Queen King. The power of life and death. But he'd been right. They were loving him. Genuine, tender, bloody, passionate, heartaching love. And he was teasing and tearing their lives right out of their bodies.

That's what I felt, and I know that it was true, but I didn't understand it. I knew that when we finished the last crescendo, and followed it with a silence like the grave, that those people out there would explode into applause. They would leap and scream and look as alive as anything you could ever see. And eventually, they'd get up on their legs and walk away. And someday, some of them would walk back again to go through it all for a second time or a third. But I knew as well that what Jack Queen King was handing out in return for their love was murder, and that they were paying his price with their souls.

I hope that you know what I'm saying. Because I can't tell you any clearer than that.

Believe me, *I was there*.

And you weren't. Because inside of you, *you're dead*.

AFTERWARDS, I asked John Joe Hope how he had known that the card Jack was carrying had been the queen of hearts. Jack had shown it to us briefly, with a half-smile on his face, before he tore it up and burned the pieces in an ash tray.

"Can't you tell?" said John Joe. "Doesn't it stick out a mile which card he's carrying? The way he acts, the way he walks—everything does with the card."

"I don't think so," I told him.

"I always know," John Joe said, definitely. "Sometimes I can only tell the suit, but usually I can pin the rank as well. Always, when it's a court card. There's always something which says 'tonight, it's the jack of clubs' or 'tonight, it's *hearts*'."

"I always figured he was lying about not looking at them," I said.

And John Joe said: "I don't think he does look at them."

That was a shock. I realised then that John Joe knew there was something more than rock guitar and fake superstition to Jack Queen King. He might play with his eyes shut, but he'd seen something, somewhere. He knew. But what? And did he care?

It struck me with sudden forcefulness that John Joe might be a part of it—with Jack. It hadn't occurred to me before that anyone but Jack was



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involved. You know how John Joe looks on stage—like something six weeks dead. You don't think of him as alive—just as a booming rhythm on a bass guitar. But he was a real person, all right, and an integral part of Jack Queen King's sound. And if John Joe was a killer too. . . .

What about me?

I didn't try to talk to John Joe any more just then. I wanted to think—about what Jack Queen King might be, and why; about what Jack Queen King did to the people who loved him. So I bid John Joe goodnight, and we went our separate ways. I never socialized with John Joe, much less with Jack. It was never my style. Except for the ill-fated one-time liaison with Marna, I never dragged work-time proximities into my own time.

That night I got out my own personal copy of our album—the one that was called simply *JQK*—and I played it for the first time.

I guess that might seem improbable to you. But I never had listened to us play. I'd heard "Black Star Children" on the radio a couple of times, and I'd listened to them hacking things up in recording studios. But I'd never sat down to feel what the music actually sounded like. Haven't you ever been too close to something to know what it's really like? How well *do* you know the back of your hand?

The record was a minor revelation to me. I already knew that we preached a dark message, but everybody and his cousin is a doom merchant these days—it's the fashion. The masses won't love you nowadays for offering them kindness and kisses. The going price for fame is blood and despair.

But that was the first time I realised how very full of misery and despair those lyrics were. It was the first time I ever sat on the receiving end of the blackness and the bestiality of "Doctor Faust," "Zero Man," "Beast Child," "Pain Killer" and "Down in the Hole."

It was good. It had a lot of class and quality. But it was viciously and unrelievedly downbeat. It was purely and simply hate-music.

But it wasn't going to steal anybody's soul. The answer to all my questions wasn't in the plastic. It was in the flesh. The record, however nasty, was only a record. I guess you could claim that there's already something soulless about someone who can glory in those brutal rhythms and bathe in thundered words that all contain ideas of death and disease and pain and no escape at all, but you couldn't claim that the record was killing people in their own sitting rooms.

All I found out that night was that you can't steal someone's soul by proxy. Murder, like love, is intimate.

I WENT TO SEE Marna during the week after Jack's superstition about the playing cards became common property. I don't know who leaked it. It wasn't me. It was probably our ever-wonderful manager hunting up another publicity angle.

The market was suddenly flooded with fancy cards. In the panel they had photographs or caricatures of Jack, double-headed like picture cards in a normal pack. In each corner, instead of the denomination and suit, J they bore the legend Q. Thousands of K loyal fans were carrying them around in their breast pockets. For luck. Girls clipped them on to their sweaters to stuck them down their cleavages.

I was horror-struck when I saw that



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Marna had one too. I just didn't get it. But why not? Wasn't what he'd done to her exactly what he was doing to them? Why shouldn't she love him for it as well?

"You're really making waves," she said.

"Have you seen anything of Jack?" I asked.

"No."

"But you'd like to?"

"What do you think?"

I shook my head. "I don't know," I said, with some intensity, to show that I meant it. "I'm asking."

"Jack was right, you know," she told me.

"About what?"

"About my singing. He had to get rid of me. It was a mistake trying to use me in the first place."

"Sure," I said. "He must have been carrying the wrong card that day. Or maybe he forgot it altogether." All the while I was staring at the thing pinned to her chest.

"I don't have to hate him," she said.

"No," I replied. "Anyone else might. But you don't. That's the way the magic works. But do you really have to love him? For Christ's sake remember what he *did* to you. Fucking Jesus, kid, it doesn't matter a damn how *right* he was. What counts is what he *did*."

"That's right," she said. "I don't have to love him." One time, she'd have hurled that line like it was a ton of bricks. She'd have had a voice like she was spitting acid. But not this time. Not any more. She said it clean and clear, right out, with no trace of anything in her voice.

"*Do* you love him?" I asked her.

"Yes," she said.

And what was all of it. The long and the short. Yes, she loved him. It cut me up. Not because anything lingered in *my* heart for Marna—the payoff in that game had come and gone a long time ago. Because it made *her* game an out and out bummer. She was lost. Walking dead.

Jack Queen King had stolen her soul. Hers and a thousand others.

In this kind of market, old Satan wouldn't have stood a chance. Faust was the hungry millions and Jack wasn't paying them out with any coin that they could use. He was working a massive heist.

But where was he going and why?

I just couldn't see it. What the hell *use* is a million Zombies?

I STAYED with Jack. There was never any real question of my quitting. There were no long sessions of heart-searching. I didn't feel that there was any crucial dilemma. I'm not offering any excuses. I could say that I stayed because he'd have had no trouble at all replacing me, but that wasn't the way my thinking ran. The simple fact is that it didn't run at all. I stayed because I was there, and that's all there is to it.

If you believe my story, then you can blame me for being a part of it. You can call me Judas on account of all the people who lost their souls to Jack Queen King. If you don't believe me, you'll call me Judas anyhow for betraying his beloved memory. So okay, I'm Judas—I don't know how to go about defending myself.

During the next few months, things simply went on. We played the same music the same way. Jack went on stage boasting that he was no longer the Jack that figured in his phoney name, but the King. He forgot to be coy about his playing cards, and he showed the audiences Kings to prove his point. Black Kings—spades and



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clubs. And still he said that he didn't know they were there until he pulled them out. I half expected him to change his name so that it was back to front.

We released the second album. "Zero Man" had been out as a single cashing in on the success of "Black Star Children," but because it was just another track off the album it hadn't broken any new ground for us. We were off the circuit for a few weeks producing some new sounds, but we didn't find it too difficult. They weren't really new sounds at all—just more of the same. "Road to Hell," "Desert Sky" and "No Way Home". . . . . .

Eventually, I got to talk to John Joe about it. I caught him when he was stoned, and his tongue was looser than usual. We'd both been rocked a bit by the afternoon performance. It was the day we played up to the total eclipse at the festival.

You remember it, of course. A once-in-a-lifetime occasion. It was a bright, clear day—warm, with no wind. But we all knew, didn't we, that the sun was due to be turned off? It was easy enough for Jack Queen King to drown the audience in an intimate, intangible darkness which became a real blackout as we approached the climax of our last number.

It was "Black Star Children." Of course.

I've never been so frightened as when I hammered out the bleak backing to those last few frantic chords of Jack's guitar, and the sky turned grey. At the same moment, the air turned cold and a single blast of wind slashed the crowd. It wasn't us. Not even Jack Queen King could command the weather. Either it was pure coincidence, or something like that always happens in an eclipse. I don't know. All I know is that it took the nerve clean out of John Joe Hope and me, and we both needed to get out of ourselves for a while. And so I got to him at last, to try and find out what he knew.

"How do you take it?" I asked him, my voice fraying a bit with the residue of the day's tension.

"I take it easy," he said. "I don't let it bother me the way you do."

"I've seen their faces, John Joe," I told him. "I've watched what Jack does to them. You do *know*, don't you? You do know what he does?"

He looked at me, his face calm and coked-up with dope. His eyes were sleepy, like when he plays, and I could imagine his mind ticking like an atomic watch—nothing could shake his deep rhythm.

"Sure I know," he said. "They blow their tiny minds and scatter the pieces on the four winds."

"Not their *minds*, John Joe," I said, my voice cracking slightly with the pressure of the words I had to let loose. "It's their souls. Their lives. He's stealing the souls right out of them. He's killing them inside, John Joe, and we're helping him to do it."

John Joe shook his head.

"You've got the wrong end, Clay. So okay, that's a real something those people have to lose. But Jack isn't *stealing* anything. Far from it, brother. It *costs* him. These things—souls, you call them—they have to be paid for. Jack couldn't rip off a soul if he wanted to. It's the other way round. They come to throw their souls away. They're longing to have their lives ripped out of themselves. And Jack Queen King gives them the charge they need to do it. *They* take it from *him*. They rip it off and he lets them have it. They *want* to be dead, broth-



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er, because it's the only way they can see how to be. They're scared rigid of life, Clay. The kind of people who come to us aren't any prize for the devil. Jack Queen King is the prize—he's footing the bill.

"You say you've watched the people, brother. You always did want to be out there with the people, you poor fool. Well, just for once in your life look at Jack Queen King. Forget what's happening to *them*—they aren't worth it. Look at what's happening to *him*. Watch him and see if you can tell me he's killing anyone but himself. Hell, he needs their *love*, and he's paying them in the only coin they'll accept. They love him with all their hearts. Do you think they do that because he's ripping them off? Do you think a guy like Jack would rip off the souls of the people who love him?"

Yes, was my answer to that.

But I couldn't give that answer to John Joe Hope. Nor could I say: what about what happened to Marna? Because John Joe didn't care what had happened to Marna. Nor could I say: but it doesn't make sense. Because to John Joe, it did make sense.

You see, John Joe Hope *loved* Jack Queen King.

Just like all the rest.

Except me.

I watched Jack King, like John Joe had asked me to. And what I saw was Jack King, soul stealer. I watched him, and I felt the only thing that I could. I hated Jack Queen King.

You can say, if you want, that I was blinded by that hate. You can say that John Joe Hope was right, and that it's poor, deluded Clay who's wrong. But isn't it love that's reputed to be blind? Couldn't it be you that doesn't see, that doesn't understand?

AND THAT'S ALL I have to say, except to tell you the end of the story. It doesn't add anything. It's just an account of what happened. It didn't explain anything. It doesn't tie the whole damn argument up in a fucking pink ribbon. I can't give you any *proof* of what I say. But this is what happened at the end. . . . . .

They were crammed in like sardines. Far more than the safety limit. But you could see just by looking that there wasn't going to be any fire. It wouldn't stand a chance. Even fires have to breathe.

They seemed to be hysterical before we even came on stage. There was no back-up group to fill in time. They just came and they waited.

When we walked on stage, John Joe Hope came over to the drumstack, and he stood beside me while he tuned the bass guitar. He didn't look up at me, but he said in his calm and level voice, "You watch him tonight, Clay. He's carrying two cards tonight. They have to be the ace and the queen."

He meant the ace and queen of spades. The death cards. Jack had carried two cards only once before. The night he'd dispensed with Marna.

"They won't be for him," I said. "If they're death cards, they're for you or for me."

He smiled a long, lazy smile. "I'm not scared," he said.

Strangely enough, neither was I.

John Joe moved away, and the scream of Jack's guitar jerked my hands and feet into action as we whirled away into "Zero Man."

It was another night, like all the rest. Everybody wanted to see Jack Queen King. They didn't mind the heat and the crush and the stink. They were willing to endure it all just to be with him. And then he snatched



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their souls.

We played through "Cut Price Coffins" and "No Way Home" and "Down in the Hole," and the long, long agonizing crescendo of "Doctor Faust." And we did "Sad Times," to get a rest, and "The Alley" and an extra-long version of "Hold Me Down." We did a couple of new numbers, for a special treat.

And then we launched into "Black Star Children," which was the last before they made us do our encores. Jack really belted into it. He pounded the guitar, and gave it a little bit of extra pain with the fuzzbox, and he fed it back into the speaker. The more he piled it on the more I stacked up the attack. We were really making it, and I felt as if I'd gone way past all-out and was flying on pure adrenalin. We were taking the audience as high as a kite—I could feel the hysteria coming across the stage in waves. I could smell the high fever.

Something happened inside Jack's amp. It got hot and something gave. His mike was no longer grounded. The whole shebang was live. He came back across the stage to sing the last few words that were the final chorus, and he took hold of the mike-stand. And it struck him dead.

Somebody started pulling plugs out all over the place, and a sea of panic washed all around the hall. The crowd didn't dissolve into a fatal scramble. It was still. Nobody out front was killed.

John Joe Hope and I stood over the body, one on each side.

"I told you so," he said.

But I still didn't figure it that way.

I looked out over the scream-strewn auditorium, and I could taste the tears. The air smelled like something was six *weeks* dead, not just six seconds.

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I picked the two cards out of Jack's breast pocket, and I showed them to John Joe Hope. Both cards were jokers.

I said to him—and I didn't just mean it for him, but for everybody—I said: "How do *you* feel?"

—Brian M. Stableford



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# RED RIVER LIES DROWNING

## C. L. GRANT

*Not much fantasy has been written out of the collision between our culture and that of the Vietnamese whose country we devistated over a period of nearly two decades, but C. L. Grant offers here one such work . . .*

### Illustrated by Richard Olsen

I GUESS IT'S SAFE to say that, at the time, there wasn't one of us who wasn't happy that day in August when my brother Thad's son finally came home for good. Of course, we're not much for excitement, Kapfield being a kind of stuck-in-the-corner-of-the-coast kind of town, but we sure did pull out all the stops and ribbons when we gave that boy his welcome home. Since we don't have a train like them movies on TV, we had to spruce up the bus stop a bit, but that wasn't no trouble because I had some old cans of blue paint lying around the store that nobody wanted. All we needed was some hands, brushes and some of Carter Bell's beer from his barber shop-and-tavern, and it didn't take but a single afternoon before that little building was gleaming like a Christmas present. Some of the women managed to use that enthusaism to get their men to painting their own homes, and I didn't make many new friends because of it, but we all figured, what the hell, right? After all, how often do we get a real war hero back where he can talk about his medals instead of us having to read about them on his gravestone.

Thad was naturally strutting around town like he owned the place. Nobody minded, though, because he'd been done bad by a couple of lousy breaks and deserved a moment when he could hold his head up. Like all us Rivers, however, he had his pride. The afternoon before Willy arrived—Willy. Only Thad could call him that; the rest of us called him Red. And right up to the end, he never told us which he preferred. Anyway, Thad was puttering around the tools at the back of the hardware store, muttering about fixing up his front porch and the roof. Not that it would have mattered, see, because the whole place needed tearing down and redoing right from the foundation. Ever since his Anne died some four years back and Red up and joined the Army, something inside Thad just curled up. His carpentry was as good as always, but when he brung you a cabinet or chair or fiddled with a busted stoop, you could see right his heart wasn't in the work. They looked fine, don't get me wrong, but the caring wasn't there no more. So there he was, muttering about things I paid no attention to



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when these high school boys came in and overheard him. Usually they took to ribbing him about the stomach that covered his belt or the brown bags he carried his bottled lunches in; but that day they huddled like a football team then asked me to keep him busy for a while.

No questions asked. I did. And a couple of hours later he comes busting into my store like I'd just stole his last bottle.

"Lew!" he shouted, his face red from something more than anger. "Lew, them kids are wrecking my house!"

"Oh, come on, Thad," I said, shucking my apron and trying to get around the counter before he started throwing things, which he had a bad habit of doing when he lost his temper. "They ain't doing anything of the kind."

"Well," he said, grabbing my arm, "you just march right on down to Hawthorne Street with me and see for yourself."

A few minutes later we were standing in the middle of the street watching at least a dozen young boys crawling all over the old house, prodding and painting and replacing like it was going out of style. I couldn't help but grin, and I said, "Thad, if you don't like it, why don't you stop them?"

Thad, his gut pressing kind of large against my stomach, turned even redder and sputtered so much he began to spit in my face. "Stop them? Christ, Lew, they outnumber me a hundred-to-one at least. Besides, there's all them girls inside."

"What girls?" That's when I heard, beneath the hammering and shouting, a buzzing that could only mean vacuum cleaners. Squinting against the sun, I also spotted Amy White's twins at the upstairs windows, rags going a

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mile a minute against the glass. "What's the matter, Thad, you lost your taste for pretty women?"

"Damn, you're no help at all, Lew. None at all. What's Willy going to say when he sees all this? He'll think I've got a woman on the side, that's what. And his mother not five years in the grave."

I couldn't say much else without I started to laugh, and when I left, he was still yelling and pacing and waving those tree trunk arms until I thought they'd drop off. And not one of those kids turned around to look at him.

But that's the way the town was, you see. The reporters from up the coast who came by to cover the goings-on, they said we was insulated. If that means we take care of our own, then I guess they're right. There ain't too many places like Kapfield left anymore, and I wouldn't be surprised to find those reporters just a little jealous. As it was, they were just as much screaming and yelling as the rest of us when that gray-and-white bus came steaming in. Some of our kids that was in the high school band brought some horns and drums and were playing like they were auditioning for Gabriel's stand-in; there were a few old codgers who still fit their World War uniforms saluting everything but the fire hydrants; women were crying and old Thad was standing up front, chesting like a bantam rooster. A couple of photographers were perched on the station roof, yelling at the driver to stick his head out for a picture, which he did just before he swung open the door. And it was a funny thing, but suddenly everyone quieted; the horns trailed off, the drums stopped and all you could hear was the sea thundering beyond the houses.

And just as suddenly someone shouted "There he is!", and sure enough, a short, tree stump of a man stepped into the August glare, a cloth bag in one hand, overseas cap in the other. And that red hair of his was brighter than beach fires at a winter picnic. He kind of looked around, blinking as if he didn't believe what his eyes was telling him. Then he spotted his father and a second later hat and bag were flying in the air and you couldn't have pulled the two of them apart with a crow bar.

I never did see so many tears or handkerchiefs in my whole life, but no one cared who saw who kissing who or crying or just plain standing there taking it all in, waiting to cry later when the joy settled down. We never did see the bus leave, in spite of the fact that we had a bunch of flowers from Cossy Borden's garden for the driver. I suppose he thought we were a bunch of backwater idiots. But then again, maybe he had a son too. At the moment, though, I didn't much care.

Naturally, the rest of the day was pretty hectic. Parties, parades that sprung from nowhere and went everywhere. On the beach that was more rock than sand was a huge spread covered by three-walled tents, and when I left at midnight, more than half the town was still going strong. I only managed to say a couple of words to Red and shake his hand, but the look on his face when he saw me was more than enough to last me the night. All I could say was, "Hi, Red", and all he could say was "Hi, Unk. How's the store?" And damned if that wasn't the way he opened every one of his letters to me.

Well, you can imagine it took quite a while for things to settle down. School's opening helped clear away



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the kids who were always at Thad's front porch wanting to hear some of Red's war stories; and the older folks just bided their time, waiting for the dinner invitations that would give them a chance to see the boy in less than madhouse conditions. But the kids were more often than not disappointed, and the rest of us could have died of starvation waiting for that meal.

He never came out. He never made a call.

Word somehow got around, finally, that Thad was making him rest up from the trip and the war, though if you cornered Thad in his shop, he wouldn't say a word but look at you kind of sad. Most were satisfied; a few got insulted. I just waited. Sooner or later, I knew the boy would show up at the store. I wasn't in no hurry; I had been to a war myself, and I knew what it was like.

And sure enough, one day when I was roundly taking the Lord's name in unholy vain over some miscounted boxes of nails, the bell dangling from the frame rings and Red walked in.

"About time," I said, trying to make like I was too busy even to look up.

"Takes time to get used to things again, Unk," he said in that funny high-low voice of his. "Three-and-a-half years ain't nothing to take away without you lose something in between."

"Well, it's just as well you came, Red. Give me a hand counting these boxes of nails? That Cossy Borden's boy ain't worth ten of you when it comes to keeping things straight around here."

When he didn't answer right away, I looked up. He was leaning against the counter, fooling with a pencil, and beneath that Asian tan he was pale, almost sickly.

"What's the matter, son?" I asked. "You and Thad have a go around?"

He shook his head, smiling as if to say he wished it was true.

"Then what's the matter?" An unpleasant thought about wounds and diseases made me stop playing the part of the little old shopkeeper and hustle around to the other side of the counter where I could set my six-and-a-half feet on my stool and not have to look down on him.

"Unk," he said, "I got troubles. And I can't explain them."

"Don't tell me you got sick over there. Malaria, or whatever it is they got?"

"No such luck."

"Then damnit leave that thing alone and let's have it. I'm too old to be playing your guessing games anymore. The time I got left I need."

Red smiled again, one-sided so I knew it was for real, and he slumped forward on his elbows, his chin resting on the backs of his hands. "Unk, I had this girl. I had this girl, Unk, and I wanted to marry her."

"You never said nothing in your letters." The fact is, his last few letters were downright dismal, almost as if he didn't want to come home.

"Ah, don't be mad, Unk. I couldn't tell you. Couldn't even tell Pop. You see, she was one of them, a Vietnamese. What do you think this town would have said if it knew I was going around with a girl that wasn't home-born, home-bred and whiter than Mom's Sunday sheets?"

It's a hard thing to admit, but he was right. When it comes to Kapfield's red-necked backbone, the South has no corner on idiots what look no closer to a person than his skin. We just never advertized is all. But Red was closer . . . Red *is* closer



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to me than anyone, including my fat-gut brother. So I coughed some to ease up the silence and said, "I gather she's dead, son?"

"Yeah," he said. "Sort of."

Anyone else been sitting there, I might have been tempted to make some sort of crack about that, but that pale look under his skin didn't go away, and I shut my mouth. Red picked up the pencil again and began doodling on the back of a paper bag.

"You see, Unk, I was at Pleiku, remember I sent that map to you? Well, not much more than a spit away is Cambodia and the prettiest darn mountains you ever saw in your life. You know, I really thought I'd miss the ocean and all, but those hills and that jungle, they were something else again. Anyway, Trin Long—that's her name and kind of pretty when you say it long enough—she lived right near the border in this village my outfit used as a kind of relaxing place when we didn't want the CO breathing down our necks. The MPs, they didn't mind as long as we didn't knife anybody or get too drunk. Trin worked in this tailor shop with her grandmother and mom and two sisters. Her brothers were in the army, and she never did tell me what happened to her father. Anyway, I was like the translator for the guys because, in three years you pick up a little here and a little there, and she knew a little English because the GIs would take their uniforms to be fixed and get dresses made for their wives and stuff. So I'd go in with them, see, and tell Trin and the others what they wanted done. I was there a lot, Unk." And he stopped. Just out of curiosity, I leaned forward to see what he was drawing, but when he saw me move he cupped his hand around it. "Well," he said, "I kept re-upping, you know. That combat pay was pretty good and Pop needed the money and all. I didn't mind the fire fights much because they didn't come that often and I figured if I went and got myself hurt, you and Pop'd beat the hell out of me. For trying to be a hero, you know? Anyway, me and Trin got to know each other pretty well. I knew her for nearly two years, Unk. I wanted to marry her."

He stopped again, waiting for something, I don't know what. Maybe a blast of righteous lightning from Reverend Callan or a withering curse from me. I don't know, but when he saw me still keeping my mouth shut, he swallowed and I could see him pressing harder on that pencil.

"There was a raid. The VC and NVA, they came boiling out of Cambodia like they was running from one of Pop's drinking fits. We were trapped at base for nearly a week before the Air Force could bail our asses out. When I got down to the village . . . it was gone. God, there was nothing left, Unk. The houses were burned right to the ground. Everyone was dead or drug off. About an hour later I found Trin, under a tree, half eaten by ants and rats." He suddenly closed his eyes, the point on the pencil broke. I wanted to touch a hand to his head, but I didn't move. "About . . . about a month before the raid she gave me this." Reaching into his shirt, he pulled out a leather pouch tied to a braided cord. Inside was a tiny head hollowed out at the neck, its eyes and mouth sewed shut with red string. I jumped a bit and he smiled at me.

"Don't worry, it doesn't bite. It's all I have left of her, you see. And . . . and . . ."

He trembled, then jammed that head back into the pouch and stuffed



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them back under his shirt. He looked at me, scared like I've never seen him. "Unk, I thought this was the right time to tell you. I'm sorry. It isn't. Things aren't right yet."

"You mean there's more and you're going to let an old man who hasn't a month to live most likely sit around and wait?"

"You'll live longer than me, Unk, I can promise you that. Give me a day or two, will you? I got to tell you this sooner or later because, well, she really isn't dead, you see."

"No," I said. "I don't see."

His face twisted then, just like his father when the anger boils and can't get out. He nodded once, sharp like, and hurried out before I could stop him. I didn't follow, though. The war had done this to him, and I wasn't surprised. I'd seen it myself, only on another continent, when men grabbed for anything that'd keep them from hearing the shooting. I knew a man who spent all his own time wrapped in a blanket. Nobody laughed. He had his armor, we had ours. I was thinking this when I turned around the bag to see what Red had been drawing. It was that head. Only its eyes were open.

I threw it away.

I tell you, I sure wish I hadn't.

But October passed, the ocean cooled and the sea winds started in earnest. If Kapfield was inhospitable during the summer, it was downright misery when the sea turned gray and began spitting at you twenty-four hours a day. Rain, precious little snow, and a cold that made my sixty-year old bones brittle.

And Red wasn't helping our tempers any. He came into the store a couple of times, gloomy as storm clouds, but all we did was talk: him about what it was like over there, and me about how the old Army was a damnsight more rigorous than the new.

But there was nothing at all about that thing hanging around his neck or that girl or the days and nights I knew he was spending out by the Giant's Teeth, a double string of man-high, jagged boulders that stretched a good hundred yards toward the water. There was a narrow tongue of sand between the rocks and at the end, or nearly so, a tide pool so deep I don't know anybody who's seen the bottom. In all, I guess, it's a perfect place for couples to duck out of the way of nosey parents and a treasure cove of sea-smoothed pebbles and shells. When Red was a kid and got into trouble, Thad and I knew right where to find him, but we learned never to get to the Teeth too fast. He liked to get out his anger by staring into that pool's black water. It did something for him. Calming. Quiet, even with the ocean breathing down its mouth. But now he was just wandering, and driving away the little kids who went there to play, just like he did once. I even heard he was taking to throwing rocks at them.

And then there was his room.

About once every two weeks or so my not being married brought out the Christian in Thad and I was invited over for a meal he usually copied from the back of the local newspaper. We'd gather around us some of the more pliable spinsters and generally have a pretty good time. At least, that's the way I remembered it being before Red came home. Since his return, though, he never joined us. While Thad and I sat in the living room watching TV or arguing about President's we've hated, the boy stayed in his room and I could hear a typewriter going from the moment I



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came in to the moment I left.

"He's writing a book," Thad said proudly when I asked. "Course, I wish he'd stop now and then for a rest, but he says when he's in the mood, I'm not supposed to interrupt. Do you think he'll become famous?"

"Maybe. You look at books now, who can tell? What's he writing about?"

"He won't say."

He didn't have to. I was sure I knew, and I wasn't so sure it would do any good. Some people just don't take to reading about another man's heart. Naturally, I never said as much to Thad, but I think he was wise to it just the same. At any rate, he started asking me over more and more until I practically lived there. In his way, he was fishing for some kind of answers.

And that damned music didn't help either.

Long about Thanksgiving, when he wasn't typing, Red was plunking on an out-of-tune guitar and trying to sing, an odd kind of singing using notes I didn't think we had. I gathered it was something he picked up over there, but it wasn't like anything I'd ever heard on the radio. Up and down the scale over and over and over, like a man caught in a nightmare elevator. It didn't take long before it drove the ladies away and had Thad and me looking for new ways to climb the walls.

"He's worrying me, Lew," Thad finally admitted one night not long before Christmas. "Spends every day wandering them damned Teeth, every night locked in that room with that noise. He won't look for a job, doesn't want helping me down at the shop. You know, he hardly ever eats and I think he's forgotten how to talk to his old man. You know him, Lew. What's the matter?"

As much as I hated to, I lied and said I didn't know. If Red hadn't said anything to him about Trin, I didn't see my place to just yet. I knew that, as soon as he found out Red was mourning some foreign girl, he would raise hell higher than the moon.

If that wasn't bad enough, listening to my brother cry and bitch, Red's wandering was getting to the town too. My store suddenly became the place where folks tried mailing their hints about their displeasure. They didn't much care for that little man walking the streets at night like some kind of ghost, saying nothing, ignoring and frightening the young ones. The way they talked, you'd think they'd completely forgotten the way they cried when he got off that bus. I suppose probably they had.

It was the Saturday before Christmas when Red opened up again. Rain had been washing down the town for days, and business was about as bad as it was going to get all year. I spent most of the time dusting off boxes of decorations nobody was in the mood to buy, and was shifting a pretty peaked display of colored tissue wrapping paper when he came in, carrying a small package tied up with a million miles of my best twine. He marched right over to me without even a hello what a lousy day it is.

"Unk," he said, firm like the day he made up his mind to tell me he'd joined the Army. "Unk, this here's the thing I showed you back then. I'm done with it now. I want you to have it. Put it in your safe. Please."

I took it, remembering what that shriveled up head looked like, and carried it like a fever germ to the back room. I muttered something about how that ugly thing wasn't doing his health, or his father's, any good, but he ignored me; and



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damned, if he didn't stand there until I'd opened the safe, stuck that package in and locked the safe again. As soon as I gave the dial one extra twirl for good measure and luck, he seemed to shrink right into his slicker. He took that floppy hat of his off and began twisting it through his fingers. There was nothing but a bare bulb hanging from a wire in that room, and I was kneeling right under it. When I looked up at him, he seemed taller than I thought until I realized it was because of the weight he'd lost. More and more he looked like an old man, and even that hair of his had burned out.

The roof of that part of the store was tin, and when he finally started to talk out what I could see he had to say, he had to shout some over the rain. I wanted to stand, my knees was hurting, but I was afraid to move for fear he'd turn and run.

"Unk," he finally said, "Trin wasn't like us, you and me and Pop and all the others. She was different, even from her own kind. She thought different, had an odd-colored skin, even smelled different until you got used to it. She didn't know about Reverend Callan's God, or even that we'd been on the moon. She used to pray a lot, though, to some funny shaped sticks she kept in a black box under the stove. She said they were her ancestors, or something like that. They knew best, she said, and always told her what to do. That head was a monkey once and those sticks told her to talk to it and it would bring her luck. Inside it there's some rice paper with writing on it, the best English she said I could teach her."

Now I was getting cold on that bare floor, but for the life of me, I didn't want to leave that light. Listening to stuff about a monkey's head and conversing with sticks was bad enough, but to hear that old man's voice coming out of the near dark . . . well, it wasn't exactly my idea of comfort come Christmas.

"She said, Unk, that if we was to get separated, I was to sing me some song she taught me and then read that paper. That would take care of everything. That's why the village never moved out of the fighting, you see. They all had themselves a head and weren't afraid. They figured they was going to live forever."

He hesitated and started rubbing his neck in that way he had when he could see I didn't like what he was saying. "We loved each other, Unk. I mean, I know I'm not all that tall. I been made fun of all my life for it, but she was even littler than me and we fit just right when we, well, sort of lay down together. She could see I was scared, and I sure knew she was scared, and it all seemed to work out just fine."

In the light, then, was a fist waving through the dust that floated in front of my face.

"She didn't have to die like that, Uncle Lew. None of them did, and I'm going to save her. Just before I came here, I sang that song I been practicing and I read that paper. I'll probably go to hell for it, but I know she's coming back. Maybe she'll be whole again, or maybe she'll be the way I found her, but she's coming back, and you got to do something for me."

I said nothing, crying inside but saying nothing.

"If you think I'm wrong, Unk, if you think I'm wrong and this is just a bad dream, take that head and pull out the paper. There's a wooden match wrapped in it. Burn the paper, Unk. Burn it, then find me and bury



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me."

I suppose I should have said something long before he finished. I suppose I should have torn open that damned package and stomped on it as hard as I could. But Red's face, that fist, the voice that sounded like it was coming right out of the rain . . . well, all I could do was stay there on my knees, shaking like an old woman until he left. There was rain coming down the little window in the back, and I kept seeing faces in it until a customer came bellowing in out of the storm, soaking the floor. Suddenly I was so busy, I nearly forgot about Red. It wasn't until closing that I had the chance to call Thad.

"Brother," I said, "That no good son of yours loafing around there?"

"Lew! Hey, I was just going to call you and ask the same damned thing. Dinner's getting cold and I got Mrs. Borden and her daughter over here waiting to cheer him up a bit. Where the hell is he?"

"When'd you last see him?"

"He said he was heaving over to the post office. He had a couple of packages. One he said was his book. He was going to mail it and make him the happiest guy in the world, he said. He stop by?"

"Yeah. He did. Look, Thad, I'm on my way home. I'll drive around some, see where he's hiding."

Thad cursed, weak because of the ladies, and hung up. I left the store as soon as I could think of somewhere else to put my money besides the safe. I finally shoved it in my pockets.

I didn't waste my time looking through town. I headed right for the beach, and even with the radio going and the windows rolled up, I could hear the ocean trying to pound us out of sight. Sure enough, when I reached the dead-end at the sand, the waves was coming in house-high and as angry white as I've ever seen outside a hurricane. I sat for a minute, not really wanting to get out there. Then I saw that fist waving, and opened the door.

The wind was bad, but I managed to look into it long enough to see he wasn't on the open beach. My legs not being what they used to be, I had a hard time pushing along, and when I finally reached the land's end of the Giant's Teeth, I was aching so bad I could hardly put one flat foot in front of the other. There was a gap, just wide enough for scrawny guys like me, between the two largest boulders and I stood there out of the wind, trying to catch my breath, rubbing my chest to east a dull pain. I knew it wasn't no use calling out. That ocean was making more noise than ten planes jammed in a hangar. So I wiped my face a bit and stepped onto the sand between the Teeth.

It was like a tunnel, that path, and the waves rearing over with great white foam like fingers grabbing for me made it seem more narrow than it was. The sand was wet, and I could see footprints. By this time, I'd stop trying to stay dry, hopping puddles like an idiot, and I moved straight ahead, one hand holding the rock for support. Then I saw the hat and slicker slammed into a cranny by the wind. I shouted, screamed like a fool and ran until I near fell straight into that damnable pool. The wind was making it like a miniature bay, but I tried anyway to see into it, to look for Red. But there was nothing but black and a strand of twisted kelp. The wind and the rain I couldn't feel.

Thad died seven months to the day afterward. I never did tell him about that package in the safe; he always believed his son was a hero, and he



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wanted more than anything to believe that he died like one. Naturally everyone thought it was an accident, but I saw those footprints in the sand, and they were sure and straight, no sign that he slipped, no sign at all that the wind had tripped him up. They tried hooks and divers and all that other sea stuff, but they never found him, and no one ever asked me if I knew what happened.

And there was that package he'd told Thad was his book. It was, sort of, but it was addressed to me and was the longest love letter to a dead woman I'm sure ever written. At the end, though, was a letter. He said that godawful music and the rice paper chant were parts of a spell not really a spell that would keep him alive until Trin came back. All he had to do was find a safe place and lie there to wait, not dying, not living, just waiting until some god I never heard of put her together and sent her to find him. And if he didn't believe it, he was to burn the paper and die like a normal man. Or have someone do it for him.

For three years, now, I put on my gray sweater Thad's Anne gave me for my fiftieth birthday and go sit down at the bus stop until the sun goes down; in the evenings, I walk out to the pool and sit down and watch, looking for a bit of his red hair. Kapfield thinks I'm finally gone senile, and I've heard talk of them putting me away. For my own good.

But I can't let them do that, no matter what they say.

You see, Red River, he's lying drowning in that black water pool; and God help me, I'm waiting for his woman.

—C. L. Grant


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*Dave Bischoff is a personable young man who has, in the last year, sold a novel and a number of short stories to original anthologies and now makes his magazine debut with a story about vampires and vampire killers—or, more particularly, an old vampire-killer and—*

# THE APPRENTICE

## DAVE BISCHOFF

### Illustrated by Roy Comiskey

"BLOODY HELL!" exclaimed the young Englishman, halting his descent down the winding mountain path. He pivoted around on his left heel in a military fashion, flinging the long tails of his Regency top coat behind him, shaking his long, dark, stylish hair vigorously. "Would you hurry up, old goat. No time to dilly-dally!" The neat black bag in his right hand thumped with annoyance against his leg. He placed his kid-gloved hand on his hip in an attitude of extreme impatience. His distinctively well-bred features bent into a frown at the old man still several rods behind him in their journey.

He pulled a gold watch from its waistcoat pocket, snapped it open, snarled with disgust. "Really! Do make haste, Layton." A dank breeze from the valley below fluttered the white silk cuffs sprouting from his coat sleeves, rustled his ruffled chest-deep collar. His eyes were a brown-dabbed blue, his nose was slightly upturned, and his thin lips were masters of the early nineteenth century upper class scowl, which they were then wearing with a vengeance. "Oh, God. Why my old pater stuck me with the likes of you I'll never know."

But the old fellow neither hastened nor slowed his steady, wary gait down the slope until he reached the edge of the large rock upon which perched the youth. Wordless, he carefully sat down on a stool-like hunk of stone, drew out a half-empty bottle of London Gin from a dirty cloth sack he carried, and offered it to his impatient companion.

"Lord, no!" spat the younger man disdainfully. "And you shouldn't guzzle anymore of that alcoholic piss, you idiot. Do you think it wise to besot yourself considering the magnitude of our present task?" He shivered with exasperation. "That bloody bottle was full this morning!"

"And I am fool till it is empty," muttered the old man. His face was wrinkled, his long hair straight and greasy. His clothes were old and worn, yet of the same superior quality as the young man's natty attire. A brown, many-patched coat stretched to the ankles of his cracked leather boots. The fingers of his ancient wool gloves were cut off at the first joint, revealing dirty, rough fingernails. He



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took off his crumpled black top hat, and squinted up at his companion.

"Mr. Nicholas—do get stuffed." His accent obviously had cultured roots, but was tainted with years of lower class associations.

"Oh bother! Oh bloody bother!" Nicholas pouted contemptuously.

"Oh bloody *bloody* bother," drawled Layton, mimickingly. "And, pray tell, what is Mister Fancy Pants, Esquire, going to do about it? Race off and destroy the creature on his own?"

"But Layton," sighed the youth. "I thought it was *imperative* to reach the other castle by sundown!"

Colin Layton answered with a short, noisy slurp of his gin.

"And I *do* wish you'd stop inebriating yourself," complained Nicholas.

"Hedley Burton Paul Windsor bleeding Fox-Hunt Nicholas," breathed the older man, as though trying to maintain his temper. "We have time enough before the thing rises from its unnatural sleep. We need but two hours to reach the creature's castle, one hour to contend with whatever safeguards it has set up to protect itself. As to your reference to my treasured libation, if I were not drinking this fine spirit, *my* spirit wouldn't be properly equipped to battle the force of evil we wish to terminate. In fewer words, I'm scared, as any sane man would be with a speck of brain left in his head."

Nicholas spoke nastily in a precise mocking tone, "But good sir! You're the famed Vampire Killer! The best in the world! You've staked them out by the dozens!"

"Years ago, my boy. And I had no intention of continuing my sickening vocation until your father approached me on your behalf."

Hedley Nicholas chuckled coldly.

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"Yes. Were it not for the estimable Lord Nicholas, always ready to please his eldest son, you would still be rotting in the London East End debtor's prison."

"Instead I am free and drinking in the lovely alps of Transylvania." The remark prefaced another gulp from the bottle. "With, no less, a spoiled twit of a chap who hasn't the good sense to believe me when I say not to worry!"

"I give up," groaned Hedley, making an exaggerated gesture of despair as he kicked a pebble into the thick twisted underbrush with a well-tanned calves' leather boot.

The dark, onmipresent clouds above tasted the horizon with tongues of lightning, and broke wind thunderously. Ozone and faint scents of offal tainted the air. Though it was only mid-autumn and mercury would not have fallen low; the atmosphere owned a clammy chill and the exhaled breaths of the Englishmen turned to ectoplasm-like puffs of vapor that rose and vanished. It was as though the gloomy, unholy surroundings sucked at their souls, pulling out spirit-shreds and consuming them.

A large flock of ravens flew overhead in random patterns, resembling black ashes rising and falling above a paper fire. Hedley opened his bag, drew out a pistol. He aimed, fired, and one of the birds exploded into a splatter of blood and feathers, then tumbled earthward. The other birds squawked raucously, then flew swiftly away.

Sighing with pleasure, Hedley reloaded his gun with powder and pellet, and said, "Good, no?" raising his eyebrows at Layton with pride.

"You're a good marksman, a'right, lad."

"I assume *you* brought a firearm."

"No. Quite unnecessary. You'll see why." He belched with feeling, patted the bottle's cork into place, rose. "Well then. Off to see the vampire, what?"

"Merciful Jehovah!"

They paced downward, Nicholas strutting proudly, Layton slightly bent forward as though merely allowing the force of gravity to carry him toward the mountain's base.

"D'ye know what the peasants call this place, old chap?" asked Layton.

"Satan's Outhouse, no doubt." Hedley's nostrils flared with revulsion. "God, it stinks down here!"

"Not far off. They call it 'The Devil's Mouth'. Know why?"

"I haven't the faintest of foggiest notions."

Layton made an encompassing gesture with his free arm. "It's like a jaw, ninny. These mountains are the teeth, the forest in the valley is the tongue, the tiny river below is a stream of saliva."

"God, what a sickening metaphor."

Layton turned around and pointed to the castle they had just come from, then around again, pointing to the mountain directly before them which too wore a castle on its crown.

"And these, my lad, these tallest mountains are the sharp, unholy canines in the 'Mouth'."

"And it's the Devil's mouth because it's got a blood-sucking vampire traipsing about, right?"

"Partially, boy. If you'll look yonder, you'll see another reason."

Approaching them at a rapid pace were a pack of wolves, eyes preternaturally aglow, dripping tongues lolling over white razor-sharp teeth.

"I make them to be about six in number, don't you Hedley?" commented Layton calmly.

"Good Lord! They're coming this



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way!" whimpered Hedley, digging franticly in his bag for his pistol.

"Of course, you lack-a-mind. They're coming to rend us to pieces."

"Well, do something, man!" shrilled Hedley, fumbling with his gun, trying to aim it at the pack leader now but fifty feet away and breaking into a run. "Those are the biggest wolves I've seen in my life!"

"Oh, *do* cease your whining, boy," said Layton, sticking his hand in his sack.

Steadying his aim, Hedley fired. The lead wolf plopped dead on the ground, half its skull removed by the bullet.

"Oh, bravo. Bravo!" Layton paused his search trhough the sack to clap. "You *are* a good shot, fellow!"

But the wolf pack was not deterred in the least, continuing its mad charge toward the Englishmen. Hedley could see their bulging bloodshot eyes, their viscious snouts, their open mouths slathering whitely in anticipation of prime British meat. He couldn't reload, he was shaking so. He turned to run, but Layton tripped him.

"Would you act like a man?"

"But . . . but . ." quavered Hedley from the ground.

"No bleeding buts. Here—" Layton tossed down a small, leafy branch. He held one himself. "Watch."

When the wolves were but a few feet away, they pounced almost as a single entity. Hedley cringed and covered his eyes, certain of his doom. But with a barking scream the wolves halted in mid air, and dropped to the ground, growling and snapping, as though they had run into an invisible wall.

"Wolfbane, old boy. Wolfbane. Great stuff," explained Layton. "You may now fire at your leisure."

Still shaking, Hedley rose and managed to reload his gun, while Layton uncorked his bottle for a drink. The wolves had formed a circle around them, snarling like demons around an exorcist. Hedley blew a blood-spurting hole in the side of the largest, which gave a bewildered look at its wound, tried pitifully to lick it, then dropped dead. Hedley began to smile cockily as he reloaded his gun. "That black and grey one," he said, nose in air. "Between the eyes!" And delivered his promise.

The remaining three got the idea that their efforts were for naught, and scampered away, bushy tails between their legs.

"The canine cowards!" laughed Hedley.

"I suggest we push off," said Layton, putting his bottle back.

"By all means," chirped Hedley merrily. He trotted up to one of the dead wolves' carcasses, kicked it, laughed, and they were on their way once more.

AN HOUR and thirty minutes later, halfway up the opposite mountain, Hedley grew bored of the ominous silence that surrounded them.

"What number vampire is this for you, good servant?" he inquired.

"I do wish you'd have a bit more respect, Mr. Nicholas. Please address me as 'teacher' or Mr. Layton. After all, you are my apprentice for now."

"And as your apprentice, I expect to learn. I've always been fascinated by your trade. Why did you give it up?"

"First question first, my lad. And *do* avoid the large spider hanging from that tree. Nasty biters, they."

Hedley yelped, and ducked the arachnid, which was at least five inches across.



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"Yes. To be honest," continued the old man, "I haven't kept count. I have driven oaken stakes through many a vampire's heart and seen many a spout of blood pushing up into the air like spray from a dying whale. Each time was more difficult that the last. Though I knew I was working within the will of God. releasing poor human spirits from their demon-possessed bodies, it seemed as though the bad blood splashed upon me corrupted my spirit. I began taking larger monetary rewards for my services. Instead of re-channeling them into God's other work, I spent them on myself. Drink—gambling—women—the usual downslide. Finally, I was unable to function. God had deserted me. Or, rather, I had deserted him. That was a decade ago. I would rather not speak of the period between then and now. But with the money I hope to gain from your father's—ah—tutorial payments, along with Baron Köln's recompense for this day's services, I hope to be able to live my last few years in modest comfort. A small cottage by the sea. A warm fire in the hearth. Friendly neighbors. And a Bible. That is why I have agreed to this undertaking."

Hedley grinned broadly and laughed aloud into the dark sky.

"You're a rotting, bleeding liar, you are. God's work, indeed! The money was all you were ever after. Rewards were nothing at all compared to the treasure hoarded by those vampires you destroyed. I understand the Count Mortlak has a tidy sum up there in his wretched castle. And you *know* you lust after it not to buy a cottage by the sea, but a lifetime of flowing gin and bitter in some East London pub."

The elder had no immediate response. He kept on without breaking stride for yet a while longer. Then he spoke in a slightly slurred voice.

"You know, lad, your father told me all about you. Oh yes, he did. About your rather wild nature. Torturing wild animals, beating children, and ravishing pretty young girls is all very well for sadistic thrills. But I think you may well get more than you reckoned for with our little expedition to Transylvania. The art of vampire-killing requires more than brash nerve or the need for excitement of a rather hideous nature."

"My good father is a bit of a liar," said Hedley. "I only beat my younger brother once. So come off your insults, old man. Tell me how we're going to get into this vampire's fortress."

"Knock on the door."

"*What?*" said Hedley incredulously. "I had visions of finding some secret bat infested passageway. But knocking on the door seems a bit obvious!"

"Only way. Only way." Layton stroked his beard-stubbled chin. "If you hadn't been so huffy during this walk, I would have told you long before exactly how we're going to go about this task. While you dreamed your not-so-innocent dreams last night, the good Baron had a heart-to-heart with me on the best way to terminate this vampire chap."

"*Which is?*" Hedley's eyebrows rose with interest.

"Right." The old man moved closer to him with a hint of a wobble, and addressed him in a low, conspiratorial manner. "Vampires sleep in their coffins during the day, leaving themselves quite vulnerable during that time."

"Yes, yes. I *know* that. That is why we must destroy him before night comes, bearing with it his superhuman powers."



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"Quite so. Now—all vampires of our Count's stature must have someone to watch over them in the daylight hours. Protection. Our first job is to waylay that someone."

"Only one?"

"That's what the Baron assures me. Name of Roberts. An Englishman."

"Good Lord!"

"Travelling in these parts some years back, he stopped for shelter from a storm. At Count Mortlak's castle. Unfortunately for him, Mortlak had just lost his former servant to a hungry pack of wolves."

"Roberts was forced into Mortlak's employ? How?"

"The powers of this particular vampire we're up against today are considerable. The Count used a touch of demon possession, a dab of hypnotism. And when Roberts arrived, he was able to get around easily. In fact, when he asked for shelter that stormy night, he was a very normal chap."

"And now?"

"You'll see when he gets to the door."

"So. What's the plan?"

"Simple. We talk our way in. I'll do that. While I engage Roberts' attention, your task is simply to render him unconscious. Or kill him if need be."

"How?"

"Play it by ear. A chair. A mantlepiece. A sword. Fireplace poker. Anything that's available."

"If he's human, why can't I plug him with my gun before he says word one?"

"If you will throw me your fire arm, I shall illustrate." They stopped and Hedley handed him his pistol. "Thank you." Layton looked up at the black towers and turrets of the castle now looming above them. "Yes. I think we're close enough." He cocked it and aimed at Hedley.

"Ye Gods!" gasped Hedley, eyes wide.

Layton's finger depressed the trigger. There was only the click of the hammer. No explosion. The old man laughed.

"Curious thing about the areas immediately around these vampire-owned castles. Gunpowder refuses to ignite."

"You . . . you could have killed me!!"

"No such luck, lad."

Hedley nervously fingered his black leather bag.

"Perhaps we should take an inventory of what we *have* then, in the way of useful weapons," he suggested.

"I'm sure a vocal one would be more than sufficient," said Layton as they resumed their walking. "You have all the things I told you to bring?"

Hedley opened the bag and rummaged about inside.

"Yes. Sharpened oak stake. Several silver crosses of various sizes. Garlic. That branch of wolfbane you gave me. And a vial of holy water."

"And I have the same, more or less, in my sack. But remember—our greatest weapons are our wits and ruthlessness. Lose neither. Our lives shall be in danger the moment we cross the Count's threshold, to say nothing of our immortal souls."

"I think I'm more concerned about my life," snorted Hedley.

"As you will." Layton shrugged as he reached for his bottle.

Some minutes later, the bottle was empty, and they stood at the large wooden door of Mortlak castle. Layton threw the empty bottle against the door. It smashed to shards with a piercing crash.



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"Heavens!" eclaimed Hedley. "*That* was a knock?"

"It will attract attention."

"No doubt!" he said, shuddering discernibly.

"Losing your nerve, young chap?"

"I do confess, the atmosphere here is not the most conducive to cheerful thoughts. I say though—you seem to have bucked up tremendously, haven't you?"

"Oh, quite. A bottle of gin is a lovely thing to hold up against reality." He took out another. "It makes the dark things much brighter."

Suddenly, the door began to creak open. A huge man peered out.

"Ah! Good afternoon, good sir!" Layton said, smiling.

"No visitors," Roberts grumbled. "Good day to you."

But before he could shut the door, Layton pushed Hedley's leg into the opening. Roberts attempted to slam the door, and Hedley yelped in pain.

"We're so sorry to disturb you, friend," said Layton, glibly, "but my companion has had an accident, maiming his right leg. We could use some help, if you could be so kind. we were travelling through the countryside, and noticed your abode."

Roberts opened the door all the way. Hedley writhed in pain at the doorstep.

"Good grief! You're not Englishmen, are you?" boomed Roberts.

Layton drew in his breath in surprise. This chap was larger than the Baron had said he was! At least eight feet high, and weighing in at a good twenty five stone! His face looked as though it had been chiseled out of granite by a poor amateur sculptor. He supported himself on two canes. Evidently even the strength of his two tree-trunk legs was not sufficient to support his bulk, which explained, in part, his confinement to the castle.

"Oh yes, good sir." Layton tipped his hat. "To the core. Long live the King!"

"Please enter, by all means. I haven't talked to any of my fellow countrymen in ages. Oh, how tremendous! How grand!"

He led them to a high-ceilinged sitting room. Hedley limped along behind his tutor, cursing him under pained breaths.

"Please seat yourselves, and I shall brew a pot of tea. How charming! Tea with Britons again. My master wouldn't like it, but there is yet two hours before he rises—ah—returns. Yes—and I shall soak a rag with hot water for your leg, young man. Did you fall off your horse?"

"Quite," replied Hedley, between clenched teeth.

"I shan't be a minute, gentlemen," said the giant as he hobbled out on his canes.

"He's right," whispered Layton. "He'll be a *few* minutes. So let's find a proper means to render the fellow as harmless as he has so far appeared to us."

"I don't see anything. Can't we use anything from our bags?"

"No, of course not. That's why vampires have mortal servants. They're not vulnerable to such things, and in cases of need, can dispose of them. So—what have we got?" He scanned the room. "Chairs. A sofa. Many cobwebs. Ah! That chair over there! Hit him over the head with it."

"Very well," sighed Hedley.

"Hard."

". . . as I can."

They went over the choreography of the act in detail.

"When I start talking about Romantic poetry," Layton explained, "That is your cue to steathily sneak behind



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him and brain him. Can you handle the chair?"

"Yes. No problem." He limped over and picked it up. "Hold it! We can't use this! It's a genuine Chippendale. Quite excellent and valuable."

"Oh, come now, Hedley," smiled Layton, the mocking grin spreading to his eyes. "Haven't you always wanted to smash up an original Chippendale?"

"My God. You're as much a rotter as I!"

"Less class, perhaps, but more style."

"I think I like you tanked better than sober."

"I *do* function better at certain times in this condition."

Hedley dusted off the chair that was to be his weapon and seated himself in it, favoring his sore leg.

"You are a bit ruthless too," he groaned.

"Yes. Sorry about that. Whim of the moment. You must admit, it worked."

"That Roberts character—you mean to tell me he used to be normal size? And. . . ."

". . . and Mortlak made him grow. That's right."

"Seems a decent fellow."

"So will Mortlak, when we meet him."

Sounds of a cart being wheeled slowly down the hall interrupted them.

Layton shot his companion a significant glance.

"Remember. Romantic poetry!"

"O, what ails thee, knight at arms, alone and palely loitering. The sedge has withered from the lake . . ."

". . . and no birds sing." Layton finished the verse. "Quiet. Here he comes."

The giant lumbered in, pushing a cart with a tea kettle, cups, cakes, and saucers aquiver on top.

"I *do* hope you enjoy our brand of tea," worried Roberts.

"I'm sure it will be quite nice," commented Layton. "And did you bring the hot water rag?"

"Yes. I hope it does your friend some good. By the by, what are your names?"

Layton stood and gave a theatric bow, contriving a dramatic name to accompany it. "Captain Edmund Sussex Worthington, late of the King's Lancers, at your service. My companion is Mr. Ned Smith, my squire and lackey."

Hedley fired a look of amusement at Layton and rose to accept the proffered rag. "A pleasure, sir. Thank you. I'm sure it will ease the pain tremendously."

"Now, may I introduce myself," suggested the giant. "I am Clayton Roberts, gentleman servant of the good Count Mortlak."

He seated himself on a dusty divan, back toward Hedley.

"What brings Englishmen to this part of the world?"

"What brought you?" queried Layton, pleasantly.

"Oh, my travels," shrugged Roberts ponderously. "My legs went—uh—bad in this country and I decided to go into the service of the Count."

"We too are traveling."

"Oh, yes? To where?"

"Merely to see the world before I settle down to my country estate in Cornwall."

"Ah, England! How are things there?"

"Changing. New styles and fashions in everything. Clothes. Literature. Music. The latest fad is something called 'Romantic Poetry'."



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"Oh really. I think I shall stick to Shakespeare."

"Oh, do! It's merely a lot of rubbish about nightingales and stars and death."

"Death? Why, Death is always a theme of Literature."

"Quite," agreed Layton, sipping his tea and politely looking away as Hedley brought down the chair with all his young might upon Roberts' head. It smashed in half, leaving him the back.

His huge head streaming blood, Roberts rose shakily and turned to his attacker.

"Great Lucifer! Not the Chippendale! How uncivilized!" he roared, and then charged.

"God! Layton—help me!!!"

Roberts' gigantic hand reached out and clutched Hedley's throat.

"Belugghhhhh," he gurgled, thrashing madly, smashing the chair's back fruitlessly against the giant's side.

Layton began to discreetly tiptoe from the room, but fortunately for Hedley, his initial blow had taken its toll, for Roberts loosened his grip, staggered and fell noisily to the carpet, pounding up a dense cloud of dust. Just to be sure, Layton batted him about the head with the tea tray a few dozen times, until the huge man stopped twitching.

"Well!" he said, throwing the tray from him, clapping the dust from his hands. "That was easy enough!"

"Ned Smith indeed!" grinned Hedley. But he was shaking considerably. "I must say, that was a *bit* of excitement!"

Without further ado, they picked up their bags and went looking for their quarry.

NIGHT WAS NOT FAR AWAY, and the shadows were long by the windows. The castle was filled with winding corridors, rotting rooms, silence, and rats.

"Damn the little buggers!" Hedley kicked a squirrel-sized rodent squarely in its side. The animal squeeled shrilly as it flew through the air, and bounded head first against a wall, leaving a smear of blood and brains behind. Malicious squeeks and scrapings, and the patterings of clawed furry paws came from behind the woodwork, raising the hair on the back of Hedley's neck.

"You mean to tell me you feel no kinship with them?" said Layton, absently.

Hedley ignored him. A fierce urgency burned in his spine, lit up his eyes with fear. Gone were the defenses of his social position. He felt naked without them.

"You had best know the fastest way, man."

"No problem at all, dear boy," said Layton confidently. "The Baron quite assured me that the Count resides in the old chapel. Which is this way, according to these plans he entrusted me with. Besides, we need not fear. We have protection."

Hedley looked in doubt at the silver cross he wore around his neck, as Layton took out a roll of paper, flattened and scanned it a moment, then grunted with satisfaction.

"Yesssss. . . . If we follow this corridor all the way to this hall and cut through this room . . ."

TEN MINUTES of dust and cobwebs, spiders and rats, creaking floorboards and antique furniture brought them to their destination.

It was a small chapel barren of religious articles. The few windows it had were bricked up with old stones and mortar. In the center, on a raised



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dais, lay a shiny, waxed coffin of exquisitely carved teakwood. The base featured a band of wood sculpture carved in relief against the thick panels, depicting hideous demons and devils cavorting among naked women.

The lid was black, as was the whole casket, and smooth as ice.

"We are in time, good sir," said Colin Layton. "Let us not waste any more of the precious commodity! You have the parcels we brought with us?"

"Yes. What first?" They stood over the casket of their prey, and Hedley handed Layton the items he required one by one, like a nurse during an operation.

"Large string of garlic," called the old man. "Wooden cross. A batch of wolfbane. And have that hammer and stake ready for when I need them."

"We're not going to use them right away?"

"No. It's my style to let these demons know who is responsible for their—shall we say exorcism, for want of a better word."

"And you give them time to tell you where their hidden loot is."

"Quite."

Briskly, he peeled off his gloves and rubbed his hands together. Picking up the items he had placed on the lid, he nodded to his assistant. "If you would kindly lift the lid."

"A pleasure," replied Hedley with a leer of expectation that somehow lacked confidence. His hands found the teak and slowly moved the lid up and over. It was hinged to the side and stood at right angles with the casket.

Inside, nestled in a satin padded bed of silk, head pillowed by velvet, lay the unconsccious vampire. Immacualtely attired in the dress of the early eighteenth century, he was a handsome man with short black hair, a Van Dyke beard and long curling mustaschios. His cheeks were almost as red as the thin stream of crusty blood that stained the side of his chin.

Without hesitation, Layton mumbled a prayer and placed the cross on his chest, the wolfbane upon the knees, and the garlic so as to frame the face.

The vampire's eyes flickered open, surveyed the situation, examined the men.

"Good evening," he said. "Roberts didn't notify me we had guests. I am sorry I am not able to welcome you in a manner more to my liking." He grimaced with discomfort.

"I'm sure you are," replied Layton.

"Where *is* old Roberts?" the vampire asked with irritation.

"Suffering from terminal headache, I think."

The Count smiled briefly. "How sad. Such a good man. Taught me English to perfection. I say! This is a *most* uncomfortable position for me."

"How sad," sympathized Layton. "Would you prefer to meet your end standing?"

"No, I mean the wolfbane and most *especially* the garlic. Foul, putrid stuff!"

"The French consume a good deal of it," observed Layton, "as do the Italians."

"Yes. And have you ever heard of vampires in France or Italy? Their breaths are murder for us!"

"I dare swear."

"Oh, please do! Swearing would make me much more comfortable. And use the Enemy's name in vain as much as possible. That would be quite nice."

"Well, as long as we seem to be having a nice long conversation with our host, Hedley, we might as well get part of your lessons from the



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horse's mouth. Or, rather, the vampire's fangs."

"Yes. I am quite proud of them. See? Lovely things, aren't they? But I say! Introductions are in order!"

"Very well. My name is Colin Layton."

"Yes, of course! The famous killer of my kith and kin. I thought you had retired from your most disreputable occupation."

"I was enlisted by this young man, Mr. Hedley Nicholas, to teach him the finer arts of the trade."

"Very good. My name is Count Mortlak. I'm a vampire."

"Do tell. Hmmm." Layton moved over to a wall. "Would you like some of this excellent wine you have stored here?" He took a bottle from the shelf, broke off the top, and sipped.

"No. I don't drink. . . . . wine."

"How clever. I must write that down. Now, if you would, please supply my pupil with the tehological reasons for the existence of vampires. I have touched upon them vaguely, but I fear young Hedley's a bit of an atheist."

"Ah! That's as good as an ally for us. I say, Hedley—I'll see you are made quite rich if you destroy this horrid man bothering me at the moment."

"Please," Layton sniffed. "Just the story."

"Very well," began the Count. "It's a very clever artifice of our Master, Satan. You see, he's been having a spat with our wretched Creator ever since we dark angels were heaved out of Heaven. We did well with you humans, leading you down the garden path, straight into separation from God. But then the Chap dealt us a nasty blow by incarnating Himself in the person of . . . well, it hurts me just to say his name. You see, this Fellow allowed himself to be crucified to bridge the chasm between God and man. Then he was resurrected from the dead, quite upsetting *our* crew. Now, a man has but to accept this Blood shed for him, bathe in it figuratively, and drink it literally at Holy Communion to be reborn into the will of our Enemy. On of our Master's goals has always been to mock the work of God. So, he cooked up Vampirism."

Layton interrupted. "Certainly, Hedley. Ever hear of vampires before the time of Jesus Christ?"

"Please," the Count grimaced. "Not that name. It trebles the pain."

"Your pain will be gone soon enough, Mortlak." Layton upended the bottle and sipped. "Now, please carry on your somewhat simplified version of the story, if you would."

"Removal of at least the cross would make it much easier to relate."

"The cross stays where it is."

"As I was saying before this drunkard's rude interuption, Hedley, God's covenant with Man enables a human, dead spiritually, to regain a degree of Grace, lost because of Adam's folly. From living death to living life. 'Born again' is the term that fellow used. Well, of course, you can see the relation! A vampire's living death is fed by the common blood of humans, allowing us demons who inhabit them to wreck all sorts of havoc. An outrageous parody of our Enemy's greatest victory over us, don't you see! Not as extensive or useful as our Master's inventions of War or Plague, but it nevertheless gives him a certain degree of satisfaction."

"That's a poor version, but essentially true," said Layton.

"I see. Very interesting," commented Hedley. "But this chap seems



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quite a gentleman.

"A gentle vampire perhaps. Not man."

He turned his attention back upon their captive.

"Now, let's get down to brass tacks—or wooden stakes, rather. *Where* is your treasure hoard?"

"Treasure?"

"Come, come, my good vampire! Don't play games with me. I know the practices of your kind."

"What makes you think I'd tell you it's location even if I had such?"

Layton smiled crookedly. "Ah! I was just coming to that. Hedley—my sack, if you please." He rummaged through it, "Yes. Here it is!" and brought forth a small silver cross.

"Blessed by the Pope himself. A very saintly Pope, I might add, if you think he might be one of your Master's bunch, as they often are. I have only once been forced to use this little lovely—and how that vampire did scream. It must have been quite painful. But see, or rather feel, for yourself."

He let the dangling cross touch the creature's hand slightly, and removed it immediately. The Count responded with a screech that shook the casket and sent a chill up Hedley's spine.

"Just think what it would be like to have this on your forehead—or rammed down your throat!!" There was an eerie light in Layton's eyes. "If you decide to divulge the information, we will make your termination swift and relatively painless. Choice, good sir?"

"It's in the Tower Room. The boarded-up fireplace," sighed the Count.

"Thank you. And I keep my promises. Stake please, Mr. Nicholas. And hammer." Hedley speedily obliged. "Now, Hedley. Please do me the courtesy of holding the stake over the left portion of our friend's chest," commanded Layton. "Yes. That's right. Ta ta, Mortlak."

He brought the hammer down swiftly. But he missed, striking instead Hedley's left thumb. Hedley gave a yell of pain.

"Oh, blast it, Layton!" He curled into a ball of agony on the floor.

"Perhaps I could be of assistance. I would like to get this business over with," volunteered Mortlak.

"Yes. That would be most kind of you."

"My pleasure—or pain, rather." The vampire raised his right hand and positioned the stake over his left breast.

"Hammer away! And please—don't miss this time."

Layton did not. The stake drove clean through the chest. Blood spurted. Mortlak spasmed, and then lay still.

Layton removed the wooden cross, the wolfbane and the garlic, and placed them back in his sack.

"Really, I am dreadfully sorry, old chap," he apologized.

"A bloody lot of good that does for my bleeding thumb!" grumbled Hedley, still crumped on the floor, sucking the injured member.

"*Is* it bleeding?"

Hedley withdrew it to see. "No. Banged up. Not bleeding, though."

"Well, be a man about it then! Get up and let's trot to the treasure before the rats get you."

Hedley shuddered, picked himself up, and they set off for the Tower Room.

"THAT WAS easy enough," remarked Hedley as they reached their destination. "This whole affair has been much easier than I anticipated. I



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believe I *shall* seriously consider vampire killing as a vocation for a time. I think I have an innate talent for it, don't you?"

"Yes. You've done quite well," muttered Layton abtractly. "You seem to have regained your arrogance fast enough." He held a torch he had found in one of the castle's rooms aloft so as to illumine the area. It was a circular room of wood, lined with shuttered windows. A bat squeeked in the rafters and left them with a sound of leathery flapping and a bit of guano in Hedley's tousled hair.

"Blasted creature!" mumbled Heldey, wiping off the mess with a monogramed silk handkerchief.

"Hazard of the trade, m'boy. Ah—our search is over!" He held the smoking light high to show what he had found. In the corner was an old hearth, its mouth boarded up. "Within that enclosure is a king's ransom!"

"Now that would be a lark, Layton! Kidnap a king?! How about it?"

"Nonsense, old chap. Who wants a king these days? Not much good anymore." He set about tearing off the wood planks. "Here you go. Give us a hand." He slurped some more gin, set the bottle down well away from the working area so it would not be toppled by a flying piece of wood, and then proceeded to jerk off the planks.

Hedley set down his black bag in the middle of the room by Layton's sack and bottle, and went to assist. With much relish, they pulled off the boards. Indeed, so consumed with their task were they, they didn't notice the creaking floor boards behind them until their baggage had been thrown out of a window with a crash of rotten shutters.

Startled by the noise, they turned, and there was Roberts on his canes, his face and head sheeted with blood. They stood, petrified, as the giant stumbled toward them and, with surprising agility, tore off the crosses from around their necks and tossed those out of the window as well.

A sickeningly familiar voice wafted from the dark doorway like a foul rush of air.

"That will be all, Roberts."

The giant wilted to the floor with a thud, and was still.

"Faithful fellow, even after death, my Roberts. I'll have to find another servant," said Count Mortlak as he walked into the trembling torchlight. "Of course neither of you will do at all. I have other plans for you!"

Hedley and Layton gasped in unison. Their long, wooden stake was still embedded in the vampire's chest.

"But . . . . we . . . . destroyed you!" The words came from Hedley's mouth like reluctant drops from a water spout.

"Unless . . ." groaned Layton in a hoarse whipser, face ashen. "Unless you're one of those one-in-a-million freaks whose heart is not on their left side, but on their—"

"Right!" finished Mortlak, as he pulled the stake from his body and used the sharp end as a tooth-pick to extract a bit of clotted blood from between his canines.

"ABSOLUTELY AMAZING!" Baron Köln was saying at the evening dinner table, his bushy eyebrows raised in surprise and delight. "Heart on the right side! Incredible. No wonder all the men I hired before failed so miserably. But he trapped you in his Tower Room, you say, having disposed of all your weapons. How the devil did you escape, and destroy him in the bargain?"



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Layton beamed and sipped a bit of his red wine. "A last resort I have never had to use before was our salvation. I vomited on him."

He was dressed in elegant dinner clothes the Baron had provided, and his hair was washed and scented. By habit, he scratched at the whisker stubs he had just shaven off.

"He regurgitated the bottles of Gin he was drinking," put in Hedley, who was still working on his haunch of venison.

"But surely that could have no effect on him . . . unless—" said the Baron.

"Quite!" Layton smiled. "The gin was mixed with Holy Water!"

Their bearded host bellowed out a laugh.

"A most curious nightcap for the good Count," he chuckled.

"When some people are confronted with imminent death, they faint," continued Layton. "Others lose control of their bowels. I throw up. Knowing this, during the entire span of my years in this business I was always sure I had a certain amount of Holy Water in my stomach before entering my victim's lair, just in case. This time my precaution paid off splendidly.

"Of course it didn't finish the chap off. Just burned up his face a bit. With the help of my worthy apprentice here, I recovered our stake the Count had so conveniently brought along with him, and stuck it in the *right* side. Quite a job, that, but it did the fellow in quite properly."

The Baron laughed again, then said, "I hope you rested well today after your excellent work of last night."

"Very well, thank you" yawned Hedley contentedly. "We shall be sorry to leave your hospitality."

Both the Baron and Layton smiled at this.

"Yes!" The Baron slapped the table with the palms of his hands. "I believe your recompense is due, Mr. Latyon. Over and above what you found in the Tower Room."

"Several bags of gold coins. A disappointment."

"Well, I shall give you several bags more. Heidi! Please bring the tray."

A pretty, buxom young peasant girl appeared with a metal tray upon which were three bags. A wicked smile of recognition washed across Hedley's face and he patted her behind as she reached the table. He smiled at her, and she winked at him.

"She is an *excelelnt* chambermaid, Baron," he chortled, full of wine. "And she does wonders in the warming of a bed."

"Thank you, my dar," said the Baron, as he took the tray. He turned Layton with the tray, and set it down on the table.

"This is your agreed fee," he explained as he handed him a leather pouch that jingled with coins. "And this second bag is a small bonus."

"And what is the third for?" queried Hedley.

"Oh! That's the Baron's payment for you," said Layton, grinning.

"Well, that's very kind of him, but I have more than enough money. My father provides me with a most generous allowance."

"You don't understand, Mr. Nicholas," said the Baron slowly. "The money is a payment for the delivery of you to me. I rather fancy young English blood."

His canines grew before Hedley's startled eyes.

"You—you're a vampire!"

"That's right, Mr. Nicholas."

"That's why we never saw you in

(cont. on page 124)



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*Dennis More continues the saga of Felimid the Bard—begun with "Fugitives in Winter" (Oct., 1975) and continued with "The Atheling's Wife" (Aug., 1976) and "The Forest of Andred" (Nov., 1976)—as he confronts for the final time his enemy, Tosti, amid plots and intrigues concerning Roman—*

# BURIED SILVER

## DENNIS MORE

### Illustrated by Steve Fabian

*Anno Domini 418: In this year the Romans collected all the treasures which were in Britain and hid some in the earth so that no-one afterwards could find them, and some they took with them into Gaul.*

*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

IT HAPPENED at Beltaine. The need-fires caught and burned in the blue dawn. Waving leafy branches and yelling, the people drove their kine out to pasture through the flames, to ward them from murrain and other ills. They lowed as they went, some singed about the legs and smelling of scorched hair. The people cried praises to their Lord the Sun. They danced about the fires and washed ecstatically in the dew. They were joyous as could be.

The stranger among them, a bard with a glittering sword and shining harp, joined in the revels. He left his long cloak before the village gate, his doeskin jerkin a little beyond it, his green shirt not much further on. He was tall, but not remarkably so, lithe and sinewy as an otter. His harp's golden strings dazzled in the morning light. His fingers drew music from them that entered the body as sensation. He sang as he moved among his hosts.

'Life returns with my Lord the Sun as the tender May winds blow,
'As a thousand rills and mountain streams run white with melting snow,
'And the bear revives from his winter death with motions dazed and slow
'In a forest wild with odours of things beginning to grow;
'Of trees reviving with him, as the pale saps quicken and flow—
'*But he cannot see what the Druids see, or know what the Druids know.*

'The grim insatiable Romans, whose way was to crush and grind,
'Who sucked the good from their conquests, and left but a withered rind,
'Observed how the Druids fought them, and murdered all they could find:
'They said, "The cult is finished," in reports they sanded and signed
(Transfix the morning mist with a



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spear—describe the dawn to the blind!)
*'But the eagles have flown from Britain and left the Druids behind.*

'Life returns with my Lord the Sun at the fairest time of year;
'The coming of life and laughter, the fading of cold and fear,
'As the blood runs hot, exulting, and passion is tenfold dear,
'And through the weeks of April the piles of kindling rear
'In every village and steading as Beltaine Eve draws near.
*'The Druids wait for an ancient Word that only Druids can hear.'*

Baskets of flat cakes were carried among the dancers, and the village women each took one blindly. Who picked the cake that had been burned black was the carline, and the folk shunned her for three days. Of old she had been sacrificed to the Sun, but the Romans had come and gone since then, and the Cross-worshippers had reduced her part to that of a kind of scapegoat—in the east. In the highlands of the west and north the old customs were still held to sometimes.

The carline this year was a slight girl with a purple mark on one cheek. An accursed thing that. When he saw it, Felimid knew the lot had been less fair than it had seemed. In some way the black cake had been forced on her. He watched while they drove her widdershins around a fire and made her leap it. When she ran away from the village in a hail of clods, bones and sticks, he followed her at his own pace. He couldn't have said why. A sympathy for outcasts, maybe.

'Freedom comes with my Lord the Sun to those who dare be free,
'As the cold grey grip of winter slackens from earth and tree:

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'They must freeze or starve no longer, who lack for company!
'The bond of the pack is broken, the wolf runs solitary,
'No more to a sleepy cluster clings torpid the amber bee—
*'Must men continue to huddle, and must it be so for thee?'*

She turned in her tracks to look at him. 'Why do you follow me?' she demanded.

'Why does any man follow a woman at Beltaine?' he returned.

'May your eyes rot in your head! May dropsy strike you! Don't make fun of me! You have eyes to see *this*!' She slapped her own cheek, over the purple mark. She had been weeping as she fled, and blotched her face even more. But she was fine-boned, fair-skinned, and her soft mouse-coloured hair carried a gleam. Her eyes were flax-flower blue.

The bard shrugged. 'It's not so bad,' he said, coming closer. 'I've seen men with scars much worse. I've seen girls of the Cruithin tatooed on both cheeks and the brow for good measure. It was thought becoming.'

'It's a curse and a sign of ill favour. And I am no dirty Pict!'

'Watch your tongue, now! My mother was a woman of the Corco Baiscind, of the old Erainn blood, and I descend from Danu on my father's side as well, through Cairbre and Ogma. For their sake let's have no more talk of dirty Picts.'

'It's a curse none the less,' she said sullenly. 'I am the carline, though they cheated with the lots. Do you seek bad luck?'

'Seek it? What's a ban of three days to me—to me, Felimid mac Fal? As for bad luck, I've had so much that there cannot be worse things waiting.' *Can there not? Have you forgotten Tosti*? 'Tell me then, what should we do? Sit bewailing our sad fates till it's time to die, or delight ourselves as best we can?'

He grinned at her. The girl bit her lip, considered—and held out her hand. They ran up the rolling slopes with their eyes out for the first clovery hollow that looked dry. Before long Felimid's doeskin kilt had gone the way of his other garments.

Her name was Celia. She said dreamily, 'You haven't kith or kin. You're far from home. Can you stay here?'

'I can, but I'm not so cruel. An enemy follows me. He's a fell one, and when he finds me he'll spare nobody with me. That's the way of it.'

*The bond of the pack is broken, the wolf runs solitary—*

She did not believe him. She thought he was making excuses to leave her, and wondered if she dared tell him so. She decided not. What was done at Beltaine had little to do with the rest of the year. At least it had been fun.

'What's that?' she asked.

Felimid's hand between her shoulder-blades pressed her to the warm earth. 'Stay down,' he warned. They squirmed on their bellies to the lip of the hollow. Ten riders passed disconcertingly near, with the faint ring of harness and thud of hoofs on turf that Celia had heard. She whimpered at the sight of them. Even Felimid, more experienced with strangeness, was shaken.

Their leader was ordinary enough. Bearded and olive-skinned he was, in baggy trousers and leather boots rich but battered, and a broidered tunic with the threads ravelling out. Magnificence became tawdry. But the nine on ponies who rode vigilantly behind him were fearful. The wind



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blew from them to Felimid, and the whiff he caught of their short squat bodies made him gag. Dish-faced, narrow-eyed and saffron-skinned, they all wore tunics, hats and footgear of greasy leather or fur. Their weapons were short sabers, short recurve bows and long lances. The bard had never seen men like them before, and was glad of it.

'They are goblins!' Celia said. 'Goblins out of Annwn—I mean hell—come to make slaves of us! Or maybe to eat us! Felimid, let's run!'

'Na, they'd see and ride us down. And goblins they are not, or even half-goblins, but bad enough by the look of them.'

'The one who leads—is he your enemy?'

'Na. That one travels alone, nor he needs no horse neither. These are strangers to me.'

*And if I'm granted my wish they will so remain. But my horse is in yon village, and if I lose him, Tosti's bound to catch me. I've a notion I'm about to see butchery.*

Celia continued to think of the strangers as goblins. If they weren't, they were as much a threat. She tried to squirm into the ground and prayed that they wouldn't find her.

Her village was British, but in debatable country. Five years before, it had paid tribute to King Oisc of Kent and called him master in return for peace. It couldn't have lasted. As the incomers moved west, they would have burned the village and made thralls of its people, but when a vast combined host under Aelle of the South Saxons had gone down to defeat at Badon, the barbarians' advance had been checked and even turned back. For the present they were Jutish steadings that vomited fire and sparks at the stars through collapsing roofs. The village had some space yet to be free. That is, instead of fearing King Oisc's men, it feared all.

The villagers were running like disturbed ants. One of the squat men drew his saber, grinning bloodthirstly, but his leader spoke a sharp command, and with ill grace he rammed it back into the sheath. The ten rode on at the same unhurried pace. The village gates clashed shut, trapping some of Celia's people outside, and they tore screaming at the timbers until their hands were bloody. The gates remained shut. The trapped folk cowered before the riders, who ignored them.

'Let the chief man of this manure heap come to the ramparts and speak!' cried the leader. '*Loquerisme Latine*? It's your honour to receive us as guests the night! Therefore open your gates and let us in before I lose patience!'

*Your patience is like a whore's virginity,* thought Felimid, *boasted of and lost anew with each encounter. I've heard it said that character is Fate. Then am I fated not to be friends with this man.*

'We receive no bandits,' quavered the village head. 'Go your way or answer to the justice of Count Artorius!'

Five years before, he'd have said King Oisc. Now it was the dubiously titled Count of Britain if anybody, but he didn't know of the headman's existence or care. The leader of the newcomers was aware of it. He leaned back in his grey mare's saddle and roared.

'Bandits? We are pilgrims on a holy mission, fool! I am Sergius of Arles and these are the guards of my person! Open your gates before they fire your roofs with burning arrows, scale your puny walls and kill you to the youngest child, after slaughtering



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these without, of course! You think nine men cannot do it? These are Bulgars, dolt! Huns, if you do not know the new word for them! I tell you they could annihilate you if they were but five! Open your gates this instant or see the truth of my words proved!'

The villagers looked at the ten stark riders, heard their people pleading, considered the inadequacy of their ramparts, and obeyed.

The ten rode in with a *clop-clop* and jingle. Those outside the walls waited to see if surrender would only bring carnage. It didn't, or not at once. Then they too crept fearfully back. Felimid kilted the soft tanned doeskin about him again.

'Come,' he said to Celia.

'I'm afraid!'

'I too. But I'm more afraid of sleeping on these slopes tonight. My enemy may come, and I tell you I'll rather face all ten of yon beauties than him. Besides, I've a charm in my harp that may settle them if they grow obstreperous. And I'll not leave them my horse.'

Then Celia went with him, but she cringed as they passed through the gates under the eyes of the silent Bulgars. They looked even fouler when one was near. They had sparse drooping moustaches and series of crescent scars along their jaws. Whether they could grow no beards because of the scar tissue, or adorned themselves with scars to compensate for having no beards, Felimid didn't care to guess. But there wasn't a test of eye, ear or nose by which they weren't abominable.

Sergius, on the other hand, was handsome. Curly black hair, olive skin, straight nose and full firm mouth all helped make him so, but the effect was marred by a cruel ironical twist of the lip. He saw Felimid, and saw that he was armed.

'You there! Surrender your weapon.'

The bard turned his head and looked at five Bulgar bows drawn to the ear. He handed over his weapon. Sergius examined it thoughtfully, the silver pommel and staghorn grips, half drew it to note the fine blue steel with its inlaid words in strange pagan characters. Sergius thought of the sword as 'it', but Felimid did not. He spoke of the brand as 'he' and 'him'. Cinncait was his name, or Kincaid in the harsher accents of Jute and Saxon, meaning Cat's-head or the Cat-headed One, for the form of the grinning pommel. By any name he was not safe to handle if one lacked supernatural right.

'Where did you steal this?'

'Said the pot to the kettle, how battered and sooty you are.'

Sergius backhanded him across the face. Felimid whitened and began to tremble. If Sergius thought at all, he may have believed it was fear.

'I don't like insolence,' he said. 'Remember it.'

'My lord,' the village head whimpered, 'of your mercy, send the girl away. She is the carline, she received the black cake. She should not have returned for three days. It's bad luck.'

*Old fool, the bad luck has come.*

'So? Pagan rites and ceremonies to the Devil's delight! On my estate in, in Aquitania, I hang men for holding such. The girl remains. Let me hear no more about it.'

Nor did he. Four hundred years of the *pax Romana*, and then a century of bloody chaos, had taken the heart to fight from those peoples the legions had once protected and taxed. The village men had more than twice the number of Sergius's Bulgars, but



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could no more fight them than five-and-twenty sheep can hope to battle nine wolves. The bard knew better than to stand up and urge them to fight. He was fortunate not to be pierced by many arrows now.

He did not feel grateful to Sergius for his mercy.

One of the Bulgars had already gone looting. He shouted for glee and led Felimid's dun gelding out of the hut that had served to stable it.

'Yours?' demanded Sergius. 'But of course. Who in this collection of hovels could own such a beast? The thieving has been good in these parts of late. I can see that.'

*It still is*, thought Felimid. 'My lord, might I ask what brings you here?'

'A holy pilgrimage. Ancestors of mine lived in Britain from its early days as a province, as merchants and traders. Two became disciples of the Blessed Albanius, and like him martyrs of the Faith. Contrary to law they were buried at a villa somewhere on these downs, in decent fashion. They were brother and sister. They have now been recognised as saints of the Church, and it seems to me a worthy deed to take their bones out of this remote island now perilled by pagans and devils, to the sanctity of a shrine at Arles. I have a little information and the hope that God will guide me.'

The bard knew a tale rehearsed and conned by rote when he heard it. Did Sergius not desire the yarn to be believed, and were he not in the habit of telling it at every opportunity to promote belief, he'd have told Felimid curtly that his reasons did not concern him. In his arrogance it would have been his natural response. He sought something, but he did not mean it for a shrine at Arles.

And much Felimid cared, save as the quest gave grief to him.

## II

Sergius did not trust the bard out of his sight, having judged him rightly for the single man of spirit and independence in the village, and one who might make trouble. He'd have slain him out of hand but that he was a wanderer, a bringer of news, who had some familiarity with these parts. It was wisdom to ask him about the ruined villa.

'There are many on these downs,' Felimid said. 'Why, Kent had more than any other part of Britain, once. Where are they now? Burned or abandoned, with grass growing over the foundations, or Saxon yokels swilling hogs above them. Gone. Have you no map, my lord?'

'No map,' answered the Greek tersely. 'There was one, I believe, but it was lost before I was born. The information I have is written. I hired a man in London who was confident that on its basis he could lead me to the very place—overconfident, as it turned out. I became sure after a week that he'd led me too far west.'

'And it seems that now you lack a guide.'

'Aye. So beware of lying to me, harper. The villa in question was large and prosperous even for Kent, an investor's great estate, a man with little care for farming who left that to his tenants. *He* was no native crofter but a Roman magnate, I'll have you know. Thus even now there must be more left of his mansion than you have said. A great stone house. A mosaic pave showing Europa and the Bull. That may have survived; my ancestor's writing says that it was well laid. *Less than five miles from the road that links Londinium with Noviomagus*—those are the words.'



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'Then your guide misled you indeed, for you're nearly ten miles west of that road. Do these writings of yours not give direction?'

'The parchment is old, it has suffered. Words and phrases are illegible.'

'And the map has been lost. A pity, that. But wouldn't a magnate, a man of business, choose to live near London, that was the stomach of the island's trade? And is yet from all I hear? My lord, I'd try further east and north if I were you. In what did your ancestor deal?'

'In lead and a shut mouth,' said Sergius grimly. 'This is useful, but I had about supposed as much for myself. Is there no more you can tell me?'

It was an invitation to the bard to say that he knew of such a place, and if he did then Sergius, who had manifestly cut his teeth on intrigue, would have him pay the liar's price.

Felimid said, 'I did pass by such a villa half a year gone, while travelling to Thanet. Its scorched stone walls had half fallen down, and broken tiles covered the floors, but I remember no pave with a bull. By the divisions of the fields, and they still show though they have been fallow a long time, it must have been a great estate as you say—but I'm thinking it lay too far to the east.'

'You will guide us there and we will look.'

'My lord, let it be done. But the Jutes under King Oisc hold Kent now. They don't love intruders. Even their common folk have spears and axes always ready to hand, and they are hard fighters. Their dogs are savage too.'

'I've heard this. But they have had their reverses lately, and they are neither horsemen nor archers. My Bulgars were both from the time they were born—and as for hard fighters, ask them in Thrace! Ask those who man the forts along the Danube!'

A young girl screamed as she ran from behind a hut. A grinning Bulgar caught her, slapped her head back and forth several times with a stone-hard palm—bringing blood to the corners of her mouth and the beginnings of a great black pulpy bruise to each cheek—and dragged her from sight. Her brother dared object. The Bulgar instantly slid a foot of curved blade up through his viscera, lungs and heart.

'If you dispute him, he will serve you the same,' Sergius told the bard.

'They are—a devout crew of pilgrims you lead.'

Sergius shrugged. 'They are pagan, the villagers at least half pagan. It signifies not what they do to each other. I have come to take saints' holy bones to a proper resting place. Without the Bulgars I could not have come so far alive.'

*And what a calamity it would have been had you died.*

'Can you trust them not to slay you?'

'They are my sworn men, bound to me by oaths of blood. For a Bulgar that is an unbreakable chain. I have tested them in other places than this. Nay, they numbered seventeen when we set out, and eight have fallen by the wayside in no idle sense. They that remain have not wavered.'

'Then you might say they have earned some ease here and there.'

The girl was screaming.

'You might,' agreed Sergius.

THE BULGARS sat around a great scorching fire fallen into glowing embers. It had devoured the village store of fuel and parts of several huts.



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An ox the people couldn't afford, or even spare, had been roasted, and the Bulgar's faces shone with grease and contentment. They were in a mood for song. If the bard did not please them, perhaps they would roast him too.

Felimid left the fire on a simple pretext. In the friendly shadows he gripped the village chief by the arms and said low, 'Give the word to your people that they must move away from the fire and cover their ears when I begin to sing. As a bard with the powers of a bard I tell you that if they fail it will be their destruction. But if they do this thing I will give them their village back. I'm Felimid mac Fal and I say it.'

He returned to the fire, cradling Golden Singer in his arms. He felt her whispering soul to soul and there was a fey look in his green eyes. But his question of Sergius was commonplace enough.

'Have they Latin?'

'None of them. Kugal there has Greek, but he's the only one—and of their wolf-barking I haven't a yelp.'

'Then you will have to give him the gist of it, and he them.'

He knew little that could appeal to a bloody-handed Hun, or even what one would call music, but he'd sung of Sigifrid Fafnir's-bane to the Jutes. He knew how the Burgund kingdom had been broken by the Huns under Attila, eighty years gone, and with that he hoped to tickle their pride. He expanded it to the conquest of all German tribes and the breaking of Rome's northern frontiers. (He knew nothing of the Hunnic disasters at Chalons and the Nedao, and wouldn't have dared mention them if he had.) Kugal unbent sufficiently to nod.

The villagers surreptitiously crept out of sight and hearing.

It began gently, so gently. A sigh, a melancholy breath of sound. It captivated with sadness, made a man think maudlin thoughts and enjoy the tears that came to his eyes. But in moments it inspired *true* sorrow to a degree past bearing.

For Felimid it was the loss of better things passing away. His gods had been conquered when the iron-shapers came, but still worshipped for long after. Now even the last of their power was fading before the Cross, and the walls between worlds were thickening until rarely and with great effort could one open gates. The last of Cairbre's line was reduced to feeding the vanity of slavers and butchers for a meal, and even their tawdry, swaggering might had no end but to lie rotting. *Children of Danu, guard your Otherworld well!*

For the Bulgars it was loss of empery and a ruler who had been like a god. They had ridden across the world. From the Caspian to the Baltic the Huns had been absolute masters. A bishop had begged in the dust before Attila, and Rome had paid him tribute of gold in incredible amounts. And a dagger in the hand of a German girl-child had ended him. An empire built on terror had broken and melted like ice in the Sun. What were the Huns now? *Where* were they? That was the dread of it, the mighty and terrible brought down to the same dust as slaves.

And beyond any particular sorrow, the anguished music encompassed all the sorrow the earth had ever known. It was intolerable. The sobs and groans of Kugal's many victims resounded in his head. He was they, they were he. Iron constricting grief covered him, despair like a shroud hammered out of lead. Beyond thought, beneath manhood, he whim-



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pered on his belly.

Felimid's smile was cruel. He walked around the fire tearing pain from golden strings. As Kugal, so the others. Even Sergius ploughed his face through the dirt in slow writhings and blubbered. His brain shook, his nerves were chilled.

The Bulgars were never out of reach of their weapons. Felimid kicked their bows, their quivers, their lances into the shimmering coals. Yellow flames came to greedy life. When Golden Singer was silent at last, the night wind seemed to gasp dirges as it fled.

Felimid made one more circuit of the fire. The Bulgars did not resist as he drew their sabers and flung them after the rest. The wood and leather of the grips would char away, the temper of the blades be ruined. Last of all the bard unbuckled his own weapon from Sergius's waist. The Greek pawed feebly at him with tear-stained hands.

Laughter, sorrow and sleep. The three secret strains of Cairbre's harp. Sleep had not seemed enough, and Felimid had not cared to make these men a gift of laughter. Let Arawn laugh when he welcomed them to the House of Cold. The villagers would see them on their way there.

Felimid saddled and bridled the dun gelding. As he mounted he saw Celia, and reached a hand to help her up behind him. She shrank a little. The awe of what he had done clung to him like a mantle of shadow, but then he smiled like her lover of the morning.

'Come,' he said. 'You are still the carline, and these fools will blame you for what has happened if you stay. Let them vent their rage on the guilty. I'll bring you back three days from now, shall I?'

Celia nodded mutely, but found it in her to hope that he wouldn't. She wondered where and how she would pass the next three days.

Felimid drew the slim sword and rested him across the gelding's withers. Starlight shone on the silver pommel and inscriptions. The bard's enemy did not fear him or any man, but he feared the sword of Ogma. Felimid held it like a talisman. It couldn't quite be said of him that he feared no man. He had imagination and he knew what Tosti was. But though dreadful, Tosti was one creature, not a frenzied mob. The gelding would scent him if he came near.

III

A LONELY ravening howl broke across the downs. Felimid awoke in the balmy night with recognition of something in the voice chilling the blood in his body. The cat's-head pommel comforted his palm. Celia's cloakenwrapped bottom nudged him; he felt it tauten.

'Girl?' he whispered.

'Aye. Felimid, that cry was not canny.'

'My enemy is coming.' He was as bleakly sure of it as that it was an hour or two past midnight, and the positions of the wheeling stars were plain in the sky. He knew their movements, though he was no Druid to cast horoscopes.

'Your enemy is a *wolf*?'

'A shapeshifter, a man-wolf. He's Tosti, King Oisc's most dread henchman. I've not encountered him in beast-form before, but I think it's to happen now.' Felimid tossed up the sword of Ogma and caught him. He made a wheeling flicker as he rose, turned over, came down, and his staghorn hilt fell neatly into Felimid's palm. 'He's horrified by silver as no



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child of the Mother fears even fire. It's loathly to him when he's a man, this I've observed, and it ought to hold him at a proper distance now. But we'd best all be close together as we can.' He steadied the dun gelding, talking softly, for it sense the unnatural presence far more strongly than had Celia. 'Mount.'

Her arms were a rigid band about his waist. Tremors went through the body she pressed against his back and the legs that gripped the gelding's flanks. The wolf cried again, mindlessly eager. Nothing was left of the man but hate and purpose.

The dun gelding ran.

Points of cold fire above, coarse grass below. Muted roll of hoofs and dim undulation of land eastward. The wolf did not howl again, but Felimid knew that he was coming with preternatural speed and endurance. The dun couldn't outrun him, but nothing could keep the dun from trying. It would simply have bolted and left them had the bard attempted to restrain it.

Then Tosti was there. The bard never could have mistaken him, in or out of the skin. His rough coat was white as a bitter frost, his eyes glowed pale and empty, his lip wrinkled back from bone-cracking teeth in a mortal, mirthless grin, and he came loping on three legs, touching his right forepaw but lightly to the ground. Huge, gigantic as man, he was more so as wolf. His lame foot did not perceptibly hinder him. He rushed in—

The bright cruel blade flashed down in all its terror. Panicking, he was gone like a shadow. *Slay! Bite off that hand! Bring down the horse*!.

He slipped in from behind for a hamstringing bite. Felimid twisted about. Again the raw dazzle of metal more savage than the direct gaze of the Sun's eye. Tosti was untouched, but the mere proximity of the silver caused a response in his beast-nerves that he couldn't defy. He melted from the attack like a shadow for the second time.

And came back. Again, and again, and again. Celia's arms were all but cutting Felimid in two, but neither of them was aware of it, and Felimid had also to ignore the gelding, which had the bit in its teeth and was racing in abysmal terror. Nothing mattered but the wolf, the snarling, feinting, darting wolf that fell back from the whistling sword time after time, but always returned. It was the nightmare in which one fends off a thing that can never be stopped.

A score of times Felimid tried to kill Tosti or wound him. The wolf simply wasn't there. He slipped through the night like a fish through water, untiring, unrelenting. Few men could have seen well enough by starlight to thwart him, never mind slay him, silvered weapon or none; but the bard was descended from the Tuatha de Danann and had affinities with the night. The wolf became as maddened by frustration as he was.

*Tear out the horse's throat! Kill him! Drive enemy and his bitch apart! Tear her, lap her blood! Then—enemy! Dog with hurting bright wand of pain. Make him fall!*

Tosti's thoughts in beast-form were not even that coherent, but such was their burden. But the sword of Ogma sprang and whirled in an endless dance. Felimid's hand seemed never to slow or tire. The wolf wondered if he could indeed bring down his enemy before dawn forced him to come out of the skin, and howled a raging protest at the sky.

Felimid cut and stabbed inces-



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santly. Pain was heavy and dull in the marrow, ablaze in every joint of hand, arm and shoulder. His lungs hurt, his legs ached. By the dun's gasping heaving breath and the foam that spattered him, he knew the poor brute was near to foundering. He'd run and fought forever to no gain. The monster was herding, *driving* them eastward. A remnant of human cunning must still inform the beast's brain. Felimid hated him, would have killed him at the cost of his own death immediately after, wished he had not shown mercy in their first encounter.

Where was he? There! *Here*! Skewer him through! Na, he's out of reach and laughing, laughing without sound. Have I died? Is this my torment in the House of Cold? Are you not Tosti the man-wolf but a dog of Arawn's mad pack? Where then are your red ears?

Felimid rasped a hoarse chant against the ubiquitous white form.

*'The wolf is a hunter deserving of meat;*
*It fits a poor mongrel to snarl and retreat.*
*Wolf! Cur! Come lick my feet!*

*'Forage for offal in some broken town*
*Or walk as a man and pretend to renown.*
*Wolf! Cur! Cringe belly down!*

*'Sniff at the hut of some spiritless slave,*
*Bear off a child and think yourself brave!*
*Wolf! Cur! Feed from a grave!'*

Tosti flashed out of the dark like an arrow from a bow, his fury too great for even silver to daunt him. Whether he was driven by a beast's rage at the taunting human voice, or the stung pride of King Oisc's henchman, Felimid never knew. With an exultant yell he prepared to drive his point down the gaping red throat—and the dun crashed forward with a sobbing whinny from broken lungs. Felimid and Celia went over its head, the bard gripping his hilt fanatically, preferring to fall on the blade rather than meet Tosti's rush unarmed. It wasn't deliberate thought, but a mix of rage, fear and hatred.

The jolt of meeting earth left Celia half stunned. Felimid, drawn in on himself with the elasticity of a stoat, bounced to his feet and stood above her. Instinct had betrayed the wolf; he'd paused to rip out the gelding's throat.

'Come,' Felimid panted. 'Come take your death!'

Behind him the sky-rim was lightening. The first sunray would flash over it like a hurled spear in a moment. The wolf paused, snarling, half minded to accept the invitation—but while he changed he would be helpless, and the silver shone too brightly. He fled, choking on thwarted hate but knowing there would be another time. Nothing made of natural flesh could have caught him, not even Felimid, and there were few runners swifter than he. The wolf was gone like water into sea-sand as a wave ebbs. Felimid stood gasping and Celia knelt gasping. The glorious Sun lifted.

'Are you harmed?'

'N-not I,' she whispered. 'I've bruises, and this arm is sore where I flung out my arms to break my fall, but I'm not harmed. Oh, that wolf! I'll see his eyes till mine are shut in death! Like orbs of cold fire.'

'Aye, they were terrible.' He sheathed the Cat-headed One and looked at their horse. The poor brute's throat was utterly destroyed, splintered white bone showing among



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torn meat, and its neck had not been broken in the fall; Felimid had heard it scream as Tosti shredded it. He invoked the ghastly names of Mider and Morrigu against Oisc's hearth-companion. The dun had deserved better.

'He chivvied us a far way,' Celia said.

Felimid agreed. 'We're deep in King Oisc's lands for certain, and without a horse. Tosti mustn't live to tell tales of us! He's man again now. Shapeshifters cannot run as beasts in daylight. He's naked and unarmed, and cannot be far. By the gods! I'll cut him into as many pieces as there are stars in the sky! Oh, by Cairbre and Ogma, but I'll joy in slaying that one!'

He turned from Celia and ran on the wolf's trail. Before long the limping quadrupedal tracks became a man's huge even stride. The bard grinned bleakly. He remembered the wolves in King Oisc's pit, the fight in King Cerdic's barn. This night's ride had been but the last of a number of terrors Tosti had inflicted upon him. Aye, the very last!

The rolling downland, once farmed by Roman estates, had been farmed by native Britons for many generations before that, and lately had been the first choice of incoming Jutish yeomen. There were no patches of wood where a man might hide, no running streams in which he might wash away his tracks. Felimid's eyes could follow them as he ran, and there was no mercy in their green depths at all.

A hill rose before him, little but abrupt, no long gentle undulation like most of the rises that swept across the land. It was rocky, steep, with coarse tussocks between the stones, crowned with boulders. Tosti's tracks ended at the bottom. He'd mounted the hill from stone to stone, leaping. Save sprouting wings to fly, which was not in his power, no other means could fail to leave tracks discernible by the bard. Therefore he waited at the top, having chosen to stand and give battle. He knew that Felimid must come. His position was better to defend than attack. The blood throbbed in Felimid's heart and brain as he climbed. His gaze roved back and forth after motion, or any colour or shape that did not belong. A rabbit bounded away, showing the white under its tail.

There was something else white. Unlike the rabbit, it was very still, long and wide as a finger on the hill's bouldery crown. A fragment of chalk, or a spatter of bird dung? Something about its shade and texture said no. The wind gusted, tossed it up, the tail-tip of a wolf's empty skin. The bard came cautiously on.

From one eye's outer corner he glimpsed an explosive spring and lift. Tosti, raw-boned and gigantic, hurling a heavy rock as a child throws a ball. Felimid jumped like a seared wildcat. The rock barely grazed his hip; that is, it took away a hand-sized patch of hide, sent him sprawling and made it difficult for him to rise. But he rose no matter the pain when he saw Tosti rip another sizeable boulder out of the stubborn hillside as if it had been a turnip.

Huge was Tosti, the biggest man Felimid had ever seen. He topped the bard by half a foot. His great lean muscles were hard as ship's cables. The rock he'd picked up was a yard across and maybe a foot through the middle. He handled it with terrifying ease. His clenched fingers, and of three on his right hand there remained only stubs, seemed about to



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press grooves in it. Felimid cut at the left. The giant turned his rock like a shield. Metal clanged, pale hot sparks jumped, and numbness ran up Felimid's arm to the elbow. Tiny things wriggled on the wet dark underside of the rock. Almost contemptuously, Tosti shoved it into his arms. Felimid stumbled back, went down again, and bucking desperately, heaved the stone off himself. Tosti ripped up another—they were not scarce—and loomed above Felimid to crush him into the ground with it. Felimid did not rise or roll aside. The sword of Ogma whirred in a low scything sweep, and bit into Tosti's leg behind the knee. It severed the tendons like a seamstress's knife cutting thread. Bone was notched, muscle and cartilage clipped. That leg collapsed. Tosti sank to one knee while his great arms lowered the rock as if they no longer knew what to do with it. He lurched and swayed. The bard thrust once.

His needle point entered Tosti from the right, below the floating rib. It led the way through Tosti's lung, and both edges widened the wound behind it, while down the ground channels of the blade ran blood and air. It split the windpipe, and the great vessel that left the man-wolf's heart. Felimid half turned the blade as he drew it back.

Tosti heard the storm-sound of Wotan's daughter's riding. He saw their cold eyes. With his life's blood bursting in his chest like the geysers of Helheim, he shouldn't have been able to speak, but he found the breath somehow.

'*I curse you*,' he whispered.

Then he fell like a toppling tree. A bursting scarlet river ran from his mouth. Felimid seized his drenched beard and cut off his head.

When Celia came upon her lover, he was sitting on the stone that had almost crushed him. His forearms rested on his knees, his hands hung slackly from his wrists, and he was watching the dead man. He held his sword-hilt in loosely-curled fingers; it was glued to his hand. He no longer trembled, but he felt strange, as if sitting some distance away from himsef. Celia approached shyly, and held out the harp Golden Singer as if to appease him in some fashion.

'You killed him,' she breathed.

'I don't know,' Felimid muttered. 'Cairbre and Ogma! I crippled him, and ran him through, and then beheaded him—but I've been waiting for him to leap up and fight again. I haven't dared turn my back on him. I cannot believe that he's truly dead and threatens me no more.'

'He surely must be,' the girl opined, looking with morbid fascination at what was left of him.

'Aye.' Felimid shook himself like a dog coming out of the water. 'And we're alive!' He took her face in his hands, forgetting how gory they were, and marked both her cheeks with Tosti's half-dry blood, but she did not let it interfere with his kiss. Yet Felimid could not enjoy it until Tosti was buried and weighted down.

He dragged the massive corpse among the boulders and placed its severed head under a bent knee. The method was said to be infallible for laying liches. He hoped it would serve for a man-wolf.

The hairy skin lay nearby where Tosti had placed it to distract his enemy. Never would Felimid bury it in close company with the man. He worked hard for an hour to raise a cairn over the huge form, ignoring the pain in his hip, which after a time of fierceness became only as if some-



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thing stubborn was chewing there with very dull teeth. When the stones were heaped as high as Felimid's chin, he spread the wolfskin atop them to mark the grave and held it down with rocks. No Jute of Kent could fail to know who lay there. Neither would any Jute of Kent, not King Oisc himself, dare disturb his grave, though sacrifices to Wotan might be offered there.

*'The maker of corpses, the maker of verse;*
*You might have done better, I might have fared worse.*
*Wolf! Man! Sleep with your curse!'*

IV

THEY WERE WEARY, and they slept for long hours. They awoke ravenously hungry, but though Felimid had eaten horse meat many times, he did not care to cut steaks from the dun. And there was no need while he could hit a running rabbit with a stone.

'Felimid, look yonder!' Celia's whisper was intense as a scream. 'It's Sergius and his goblins! They did not die!'

For an icy fracturing of time he thought she was correct. Ten had Sergius and his Bulgars been, and ten were these riders. But after watching them a little longer, he knew they were not the same men, and whistled in relief.

'It's not Sergius,' he said. 'He rode a dappled mare, and his greasy killers mountain ponies. These have horses tall and big as the gelding. See how their casques and mail shirts glitter? There cannot be two war-bands in Britain mounted and armed like that! By Cairbre, I hope I'm right and they *are* of Count Artorius's men! It's our trail they follow and we can't outrun them.'

In a little while a half circle of horsemen faced the pair. They were marked by hard fighting and hard sleeping, shields battered, helmets dinted, cloaks rent and stained; but they were the hope of Britain, and a kind of glory clung to them. Most gave murmurs of recognition when they saw Felimid, and two greeted him as friends, but even they left further speaking to their leader. He bestrode a magnificent sorrel. The others sat horses no less splendid, grey, golden, chestnut, red and black, such as had not been seen in Britain before Count Artorius's advisor, of whom it was whispered that he was Britain's last great Druid reborn, had driven their sires and dams out of nowhere—or out of some Otherworld to which only he knew the key—on a foggy Samhain Eve, twenty and one years past. Much rumour and little certain knowledge surrounded him—but indisputably the horses were real.

Said Felimid, 'Good hail, Palamides! It seems that every Roman whose forebears were Greek has come to this land by the long road. I ask myself why, since you do not like the weathers.'

'Weathers?' echoed Palamides sourly. 'Here is weather of but one kind; abominable.' He had been a cataphract of the East Roman Empire, later to be known as the Byzantine. Why he had come such a long way from it he had never said. As of the Count's advisor and the horses, there were rumours. 'Do you mean that I'm not the only such fool in Britain, and that you've lately met the other?'

'I have that. But for a countryman of yours he did not endear himself to me. I'll tell you of him—but were you after searching for me?'

'No, Felimid. I hadn't thought you



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were in these parts. The lads and I have been burning out Saxons, and we're soon to rejoin the Count at Verulamium. But when we came upon prints of a horse large as our own, double burdened and fleeing from a wolf the size of a calf, then we had to see what had become of it. I might have known it would be you in the saddle! And that's the horse yonder, no doubt.'

'Aye. The wolf is also dead.' Felimid did not say who the wolf had been. Palamides would not believe him, and the last thing he wanted now was for his name to be bandied about as that of Tosti's slayer. Celia wouldn't babble it. She was too afraid of the strangers to venture a word unasked, and had no Latin if she did dare come forward. She was wise not to. Rape and slaughter was all in the day's work to most of them. She was glad she hadn't met them alone; and that Felimid was on good terms with them.

Over a meal and a fire, the bard told of Sergius. Palamides' dark, clean-shaven face was thoughtful as he listened. Though he scorned the beliefs of his comrades-in-arms as superstition—while having his own in God's plenty—he knew that bardic powers were real and had been greater before the Cross, before the Romans. He did not ridicule the story, nor did he interrupt it.

'Well, the fellow lied to you,' he said at last.

'I'd surmised as much.' Felimid laughed. 'Saints' bones! Garbage! If there ever were martyred saints in that one's family, the rest must have married badly in all the generations since!'

'Be quiet, irreverent one. It's no joking matter. This Sergius will surely burn for it; but he lied as well about coming from Arles. It's not possible that he swore Bulgars to his service so far west. Perhaps in Thrace, or on the Danube frontier, or some shore of the Euxine—perhaps in Constantinople itself.' *How I ache to see it once more*! 'But never in Arles. He desired to make his journey seem shorter and so less important, and did not expect any in Britain to know better. He wasn't aware that to British Romans in these days, it's as far to Arles as to Constantinople. Hmm. You have sharp ears and a quick mind. Did he give nothing away?'

'There was one thing. It signified little to me, but the way he said it echoed of some inner meaning. I asked him what his ancestor had traded in. He answered, "In lead and a shut mouth." '

'Lead and a shut mouth,' Palamides repeated. His eyes gleamed suddenly. 'By Heaven! Did he so?'

'Can you riddle it?' asked the bard.

'I think I can. I've wandered far and hard myself, and have learned to talk with travelling merchants. They know more than kings, and often see deeper—they must. Not that their yarns should be taken without salt. Well. When the Empire ruled Britain, it was a great source of lead and therefore of silver. I've heard that British silver once did much to supply the mints of Gaul. After the legions marched away, and before it became terribly plain that they wouldn't be back, many citizens hid their treasure against pirates and rebels in hope of better times. More than one of them never did return for it. I'll opine it's what this Sergius is hunting for.'

'It's a long journey for a table service and maybe a casket of coins.'

'Too long a journey—for that. I believe it must be a greater hoard. Didn't Sergius say his ancestor dealt



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in lead? How if the family had for generations been lessees of a mine, or more than one? Did not Maximus—him you call Macsen Wledig—have his own mint in London when he'd usurped the rule of Britain, not long before the end? Suppose this family that I am hypothecating helped supply the silver, and for all we know operated the mint. A great deal could have stuck to their fingers, and more could have come their way after the legions left. Suppose also that they were too greedy, and waited too long, and had to get out very quickly, leaving the bulk of their wealth behind.' The cataphract's teeth glinted in the firelight; he may have been smiling. 'I daresay there's nothing in it, but if it should be true—my Lord Artorius can make better use of such treasure than any stranger from *Arles*.'

'Who will not be needing it,' added Felimid. 'He's almost surely dead.'

Felimid was mistaken. The men in Celia's village had been too unnerved by what he'd done to take the best advantage of it. Sergius had escaped with five of his Bulgars. He was armed, having left his own sword by his horse after robbing Felimid of his, and having regained it later. The villagers shouldn't have let him do so, though he'd have taken some stopping. Kugal too was armed. He'd crawled into the darkness a little way before the bard's shaking music had reduced him to whimpering meat, and Felimid had passed him by. He'd destroyed the man's other weapons, but Kugal with a sword was formidable enough, and there were not words in any tongue, not even his own, for the way he craved vengeance. The bard had shamed him.

His hunger to kill was so intense that he'd overridden his master's orders and forced him to follow Felimid and Celia.

They lay together among the Count of Britain's war-men, touching pleasurably without coupling. Celia's eyes shone dimly, moving to watch three of the party as they went to stand sentry-go. Felimid kissed her unmarked cheek because it was nearest.

She whispered, 'I fear these men. The single man I have known and not feared is you. If they had come to our village they would have been as bad as the goblins.'

'From what Palamides was telling me, nobody can be as bad. He's fought them on a river border stablished to keep them out of his country, like the Wall here. But his notion is that they came to Britain seeking treasure. He wants me to lead him to the villa I told Sergius of.'

'That is not good,' Celia said. 'You invented the yarn but to stay him from killing you at once, didn't you? You never believed it was or might be the villa he wanted? Then when these men find nothing there, they too will kill you!'

'No, Celia, they will not. I know them. At Badon we fought together. Gareth of Eiddyn there, and his brother Gaheris, are my friends. The Roman'—so Felimid thought of Palamides, and so indeed did Palamides consider himself—'is not, especially, but he knows me. And he's just. That there's treasure to be found is his fancy. He won't blame me if it proves wrong.'

'He will be disappointed, and want to kill *someone*.'

Felimid chuckled. 'He may, that's true—but he will not dare cut off my head. I'm a bard, and most of his men come from the west or north. They still revere bards. And I too could have something to say about it.'



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He didn't warn her that the danger was likely to be greater if rich treasure *was* found. Palamides' fine intentions of giving it to his war-leader might then vanish like frost in the morning Sun. In an ordinary squabble over wealth, Felimid would not care who won—but Count Artorius was often pressed to pay tribal princes for forage, skilled armourers, now rare as birds' teeth in the island, for their work, though they should rightly have paid him for fighting in their defence. He hadn't been above plundering churches, at times, to raise what he needed. Even a moderate amount of silver would break shackles from his feet, and he was all that held back the invaders.

A wolf's ravening howl echoed shockingly close. Celia shuddered deeply. The eerie sense of a thing twice experienced, and the blind, terrifying conviction that Tosti had come back, set a thousand clammy little frogs hopping on Felimid's skin. The sudden scream of a fear-maddened horse out there in the dark did nothing to assure him he must be wrong.

*'I curse you.'*

The horse ran blindly into the camp, and would have charged through it had not Gareth and three other men halted it by main force.

'Palamides!' yelled Felimid. 'That is Sergius's grey mare!'

'Then he must be living,' snapped Palamides. 'Come with me! You, Balin, Kehydi, come too—and bring firebrands! I'll know what's afoot here.'

The mare plunged and kicked so wildly that all four men were tested to hold her. Her eyes rolled madly, her ears were laid back. Would a natural wolf affect her so? It made heavy demands of Felimid's courage to run after Palamides, but it never entered his head to stay behind. Perhaps the sword of Ogma would be needed—and perhaps even he would be useless.

The wolf bayed exultantly to hear them coming. Then his wild lupine joy faded as if some sudden hand had forced him into a muzzle. None of them saw the beast. Balin stumbled over his victim, but the wolf had vanished. The victim proved to be Kugal, his arm horribly savaged, shredded to the naked bone while shielding his throat—and the creature had then gone for the belly. It wasn't surprising that Kugal was dying quickly. He gurgled a few phrases that had no meaning for his hearers. Even in his pain—the Bulgars were a hardy lot—he understood it, and gasped final words in a softer accent. Then he died. He'd travelled far to do that.

'He spoke in Greek,' Palamides said.

'Save his mother tongue, it was the only one he knew. So Sergius told me. What said he?'

'It sounded like—*white wolf, demon*! Odd. The wolf you slew was white.'

'He was, indeed,' answered Felimid in a strange voice. 'Let's return and build up the fire. You will not believe the things I have to say.'

Palamides did not.

'You never *saw* this madman Tosti become a wolf,' he argued. 'You saw a wolf, any wolf, that harried you through the night but gave up the chase at dawn. Then you chanced upon Tosti again, wearing a wolf-skin—as he's done as long as you have known him!—and slew him, which was a fine morning's work.' *If true*, he didn't say but plainly thought. 'Well, but it's evident from this that your wolf lives, and was not one and the same with Tosti. It must



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be rabid, foaming mad, or it wouldn't behave as it has. We'd better keep doubly careful watch.'

'A *white* wolf, lame of the right fore-foot, whose tracks merge with those of a man? And Kugal said demon.'

Palamides shrugged. For superstition there was little to choose between a Hunnic warrior and a Celtic bard. So said his shrug. But Felimid slept not at all the rest of that night. He shared the successive watches as they came and went, while snarling wolves with pale eyes prowled ever at the fringes of his vision. A voice of mortal agony said time and again, *'I curse you.'*

With daybreak, they discovered the full carnage that had been done within a mile of their resting place. Five men, counting Kugal, lay gruesomely torn and mangled on the turf. Five sturdy ponies were similarly scattered in grotesque death. Sergius's dapple-grey mare had survived, and perhaps Sergius, for he was not discovered among the victims. But all of the Bulgars who served him had now reached their end.

'No ghost did this,' declared Palamides.

'Agreed. A ghost does not leave tracks.' Felimid pointed to wolf prints. 'But these were not made by the same wolf I saw. That one was lame, and a deal bigger, though this is no cub wi' the milk teeth new in his head. But Tosti is dead, and no matter how you disbelieve, I know the lame wolf was he. This is another, and yet—a white pair, both given to wanton slaughter? No true wolf does that. The shapeshifter joys in it because he's in most ways a man. Och, it's beyond me.'

'I wonder to hear you confess it.'

'Wonder away. And when you find yourself dragged down, with gore-stinking hot breath on your face and fangs hunting your throat, confess with your last breath that I—ha, what's this?'

'Meseems, torn clothing.'

'Sergius wore it. And that's one of his boots yonder, I think.'

'Then he will be dead, and it's all to the good. The wolf dragged him off and ate him, so much is clear.'

'There's no blood on his garments. I don't know what to think.'

'I can tell you. Think of taking us to the villa Sergius sought so diligently. We may find an answer or two awaiting us there. And don't question events too closely, Felimid, for here by Heaven's favour you have a horse to replace the one you lost! Most men would be glad.'

'I'm beside myself with delight,' Felimid said wryly.

The dead men's gear included mattocks, a spade and a crowbar. It was surprising that they had found time to snatch them before they left the village, but with four of their comrades destroyed and their weapons gone, they must have been forced to grab what makeshifts they could to win free at all. The bard had no tears for them. He felt that Celia's marred face was greater pity than all their deaths. It was unfair that she should wear her purple mark, but many things were unfair, and not being a magician he couldn't remove it. Wait, now! *Not being a magician, he couldn't remove it.*

But he knew of one.

If he hadn't also died, as was likely.

Hmm. It was perilous, but it was a thought. He'd share it with Celia later, if it still mattered then. If it didn't, why nothing else would matter either. To him or to her.



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V

TIME HAD BROKEN the stone walls and brought them almost to the ground. The roofs had fallen in. Paves were sifted across with grassy soil by a century's wind and rain. Shallow dimples in the earth marked where post-holes had been, all that remained of the outbuildings.

'And fools can say even now that the Empire is not shattered in the west,' Palamides muttered bleakly. 'God! This was a rich farm once. Now look at it.'

Felimid had done so before, though not so closely. He walked where the soil was thin, stamped once or twice.

'I'm thinking there is laid stone under here,' he said. 'It's flat enough, and has the feel. Sergius said something of a pave with a design of Europa and the Bull. What would he have meant by that?'

'A mosaic scene from a heathen legend,' answered Palamides. 'It's something to look for. Let's have this earth spaded away and see what we find.'

The warriors drew lots for the work. The loser grumbled and cursed as he plied the spade. It slid easily between earth and pave, but easy or hard the task was one for a peasant. The bard was amused, deplorably so for a man who also hated such chores, but he did refrain from the capital crime of giving merry advice while he watched; a sensibility the loser's comrades did not share. The stones were cleared, and a brief heavy downpour washed them clean. The scene on the pave was faded and discoloured, and dusk was coming on, but the great bull with the naked maiden clinging to his back was unmistakeable. The bull was more to be desired than the maiden, and surely had been even when the work was new. Palamides spat with contempt; he had lived in Constantinople.

'One hopes the Saxons hacked in many pieces the fool who did this.'

'I wasn't believing this could be the place,' Felimid said. Excitement began to burn in him. 'By Cairbre's fingers, but it may be! Where to dig first?'

'Why did Sergius talk so specifically of this pave?'

'It was in the writings his ancestor left.'

'And why do you suppose his ancestor would feel a need to mention it? It's very poor work. Surely a rich magnate could hire or buy a better artist, unless his taste was on a level with Trimalchio's—or he'd no time to seek talent. Or dared not give the task to one who might be missed. Give me the crowbar.'

He moved back and forth, thumping the bar on the pave. The hollow sound was almost the same as the noises elsewhere, when it came, but not quite, as all there agreed. A febrile anticipation gripped them.

'It's a pagan picture,' complained Gareth. 'Who would have chosen it in Christian times?'

'A man who wanted it to seem older,' answered Palamides, smashing the bull's hind quarters to shards. Impatiently, he broke and levered up a couple of the underlying flat stones. 'It grows too dark! Make lights, some of you. Let others bring mattocks and break me this hole wider. Dig it deeper. By the Passion! If nothing is down there but bones and broken crockery, someone will have to die!'

Celia darted the bard an I-told-you-so glance. He moved closer to her and wished Palamides had sounded more as if he was joking. He might have fled had he not been so gripped by the need to know.



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What happened was thus in part his own fault. He'd less hunger for wealth than most men, but he was not immune to it, and the romance of buried treasure touched him more deeply. The wolf came ghostlily, stalking among the ruined walls with the wind blowing from the horses to him. He lusted for warm blood to wash his tongue and living meat to tear. He salivated thickly. But his vestiges of human cunning told him what must be done first.

Felimid heard the low burring snarl in the brute's throat and felt the hurtling body slam him flat in the same instant. He lifted an arm to defend his throat, but he'd have been too late to save it—if that had been the wolf's target. Instead he shut awful jaws on Felimid's sword-belt and jerked sharply. The iron buckle broke like a tinsel gaud. The belt snapped from around Felimid's body like a ribbon. Gareth of Eiddyn lunged; the wolf didn't notice. He got the scabbard crosswise in his mouth and ran. Every nerve of his transformed body twitched in horror of the metal so close and hurtful. But he did not drop it as he longed to do. Not yet. One more bound, and one more, and yet another. Men were contemptible, slow and confused. They couldn't pursue. Soon he would go back. Soon—

'I ran him through,' said Gareth, aghast. 'I drove this blade from side to side, I swear it. He shook himself free as a dog shakes drops of water, and—see!—there is no blood!'

'You missed your stroke.'

Gareth looked half convinced, but Felimid knew better. Kincaid had been taken. With the skin rippling shallowly on his flesh, he grabbed the crowbar.

'*Dig!*' he snarled. 'The beast will return. He's taken the one weapon we have that can slay him. If we cannot find others beneath this pave we are all dead men!'

Flat stones and a layer of gravel had been cleared away, baring heavy timbers much rotted by damp and time. Felimid drove the crowbar into them, with a hollow thudding that was far more obvious now. Palamides and the others watched him as if he'd gone mad. He levered a large sliver from the crack between two planks, rammed the crowbar down, wrenched, twisted, struck, hammered. One of the planks broke. Felimid rained blows on the other beside it. The timbers suddenly slid inward, taking a slippage of gravel and pavestones with them. Falling crashing noises came from the hole beneath. The surface mosaic held together a little longer; a few taps of the crowbar broke it apart, and Europa was legless below the knees.

'Watch for the wolf,' gasped Felimid. He dropped the crowbar clattering down the hole. Then, seizing a torch, he lowered himself after by one hand, and seeing that he'd but a couple of feet to fall, released his hold. He landed lightly, but slipped a little on the fallen rubble.

For a treasure chamber the place was inglorious. There were beetles and spiders, a choking musty smell, and great pale curtains of cobweb over everything. They withered away when Felimid touched them with the flaring brand.

Among the first things he discovered was a ladder. It had been stoutly made by a worthy carpenter, and might still serve if he was careful about climbing it. He propped it in place.

Celia shrieked. Almost as loud and shrill sounded the maddened neighing



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of war-horses, mixed with the oaths and prayers of fighting men, and over it all a heart-freezing howl. Celia clambered down the ladder.

'He's come back,' she said unnecessarily, lips pale.

Felimid had broken the lid from an iron-bound box. Now he tucked it under one arm and climbed. His head and shoulders emerged into torchlit chaos. Mail-shirted men struck and hacked with ineffectual swords at a snowy monster that laughed at their prowess. Two had fallen before him, and thick dark streams wandered across the pave. The horses stamped and shrieked. The brute was elusive as running water, implacable as a *geas*. He killed again as Felimid watched.

Felimid swung the box about his head, spilling the contents widely, tossing the last of them out with a jerk of his wrist. Coins rained everywhere, shining, bounding, ringing, rolling. Some struck the wolf's pelt, and he spasmed as if stung by wasps. For an instant he stood very still among the horrible pieces of silver, trapped and baffled. Then he made a desperate, arching, deadly leap at the bard. They tumbled into the rude crypt together. The wolf gave an improbably naive yelp of surprise as he fell, as if he hadn't known that a man's head and shoulders poking out of the ground implied a hole beneath.

They hit bottom with a brutal jolt. Felimid landed on top and heard lupine ribs crack, but they knit and healed before he could clap a wrestler's hug around them. Celia was too terrified even to scream again. The pair rolled over and over. Felimid clung madly to the shaggy back, inflicting dagger-wounds that did not bleed, and closed at once when the stabbing blade was withdrawn. The writhing wolf would shortly, oh very shortly, make an end of this nuisance. Celia regained some presence of mind and felt about the floor for anything she might use to protect herself. She touched a round flat object, its surface figured in relief. She threw it spinning with all her strength.

It stuck in the monster's hairy side, slotted precariously between two ribs. He raised a howl of agony that shook the crypt. Felimid had lost his dagger; he clung to the wolf's snout with fingers like iron hooks, while his free hand groped blindly for a weapon. It found a short chunky ingot. With desperate strength he smashed it through the wolf's skull, through the shallow brain-pan so that it stuck there, spattering grey, pink and red up his arm. The wolf jerked epileptically, dislodging the thrown plate from his side, and lay feebly twisting like a beheaded snake.

Like a snake, too, he writhed out of his skin.

Dark-haired, olive-skinned, Sergius lay on the bloodstained hide. There was a gash between his ribs, and the back of his head was an ugly sight. The bard turned him over with a foot and felt of the wolfskin. It was the same. It had been Tosti's.

'He found the cairn,' Felimid guessed. 'He was following us, and he found the cairn. I suppose he took this because he fancied it. Any of his Bulgars had known better.'

'He wasn't even above robbing graves,' said Celia, low.

The torch on the floor guttered out at last. When Palamides and Gareth came down the ladder with new ones, they searched the crypt with increasing disbelief. Not Palamides at his most optimistic had approached the truth.

There was household silver, includ-



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ing plates, trays, candelabra, bowls, wine-cups, sauce-boats and dishes. They were tarnished black and draped in cobwebs, but the weight and feel of them spoke for their genuineness, and they could be polished anew. There were other caskets of coins, and there had been leather bags, long since rotted away, their contents in piles on the floor, or scattered by the struggle just ended. There were *denarii* of fine and impure metal, worn clipped *siliquae*, Treviri coins from Gaul, and a large number bearing the head and name of Magnus Maximus. (Palamides had been right, it appeared.) But even this was not all. There were stacks—*stacks*—of flattish or chunky ingots, some stamped with the mark of authority, others more crudely moulded and bearing no mark, cupellated with lead on the sly and smuggled to this estate. Someone had made a very good thing out of the final confusion in the province.

It was not a king's ransom, because no king in Britain could have paid it.

'It was not Tosti, then,' Palamides remarked later. 'Sergius was the man-wolf.'

'Not so,' Felimid contradicted. 'It was Tosti. He came from his mother's womb as a wolf cub, they say, but he could shed or assume the skin as he pleased, so that it was by night. Thus when I slew him, I did not dare bury the skin with him. I spread it atop the cairn, and Sergius came along and stole it. I hazard he slept in it for warmth and it drove him mad. *He* tore his own garments from himself, as berserkers do in their fits. He became a beast and savaged his own men. Then he trailed us, to gain the silver or to be sure it stayed hidden forever—who knows? But he's dead now, and as for the skin—' He flung it into the fire. 'I ought to have done this first.'

The pelt moved, squirmed, flapped like a rag in a gale. Felimid pinned it in the fire with the crowbar and endured the stink while it burned.

In the morning he found Kincaid where the wolf had dropped him. He hadn't been carried far, as a man cannot carry hot iron far, even with leather wrapped around it. None disputed his right to the dappled mare, and all he would take of the treasure was as much as his two fists would contain. 'I travel light and fast,' he said, 'and I'm for London.'

'Not immediately, I fear.'

'What's this?'

Palamides gestured at the pave, covered again as neatly as might be with the strips of turf that had been removed. 'We cannot bear the half of the treasure away, so I prefer to have all who know of it in my sight until Count Artorius is told. I mean no insult, Felimid. Why, I'd scarcely trust myself if I weren't surrounded by men of tried loyalty, and too many to keep a secret if they were corrupt.'

'That is what gnaws me,' Felimid said. 'They are too many to keep a secret. *I need to leave Britain at once.* There are friends of mine who may suffer greatly if it's known that I live. I've had setbacks and changes of plan enough now.'

'Then I truly sorrow to present you with another, but it must be. You and the girl will accompany us to Verulamium, and after you may go where you please. Never fear, this will be kept a deep secret for our reasons as well as yours.' Steel rang briefly in Palamides' silken voice. 'And we will forgo the delights of your music on the way.'

Felimid knew when to capitulate.

He mounted the grey mare, and Celia rode double with him.



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'Half my coin is yours,' he said to her. 'You saved my life, and though you may be thinking it impious of me, I value it at more than thirty pieces of silver. And after Verulamium, what for you? London?'

'Silver,' she whispered. 'I never saw silver before. But Felimid, I'll not go to London with you. I want nothing there, and I don't wish to leave Britain. Besides—all my life was peaceful before you came. Not pleasant, but peaceful. Since I've loved you, in only three days—I, well—' She couldn't say further. 'Are you angry?'

Felimid was silent awhile. 'Na, not angry. I don't doubt that you're wise. I've had little but trouble since I left home my own self. What will you do then?'

'Go back to my home. I haven't much choice. I'd be one of the bright whores in the baggage train of the Count's war-band if I was better favoured—but as it is I'd starve. In my village they think I'm bad luck. Some even think me a witch. Huh! I wish I was! At least I'd have a paying trade.'

'True. Hear me then, Celia: I know a man who can take the mark from your face, if he lives yet. It's perilous to look for him, and more so, maybe, to deal with him, but he's a wizard of certain proved power. His name is Pendor.'

As they rode he told her of the strange man who laired in the Forest of Andred. Of his treachery, and of the dangers that must be faced merely to reach him. Of his powers and weaknesses, and of his greed that silver could touch. Most of all of the necessity of never once hinting that she had known Felimid mac Fal.

'Then you will not be there to help me.'

'I did not lie to Palamides. I must leave Britain for my friends' sake. But Gareth is another friend, and I can ask him to escort you. In memory of blood spilt at Badon, I'm thinking he will. Will you trust me when I say he's to be trusted?'

'Aye,' she answered, unhesitating.

'Then good. Mind, you may have to do his doubting for him. He's rather too honest.'

'I'm fitted for that!' she said with spirit. 'In the meantime, at Verulamium—can we lie in a true bed a night or two? I never have.'

'I suppose there will be some.' He yawned. 'Best we sleep in it from dawn to dawn, or dusk to dusk, before using it for aught else. I'm weary to the bone.'

'And I to the marrow.'

Then she said no more, and he said no more.

—DENNIS MORE

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***ON SALE IN MARCH AMAZING (JAN. 20th)***

ALEC'S ANABASIS BY **ROBERT F. YOUNG**, THE BENTFIN BOOMERGIRL COMES THRU BY **RICHARD A. LUPOFF**, SHIBBOLETH BY **BARRY N. MALZBERG**, THE AMAZING INTERVIEW: **HAL CLEMENT** conducted by **DARRELL SCHWEITZER**, THOSE THRILLING DAYS OF YESTERYEAR BY **JACK C. HALDEMAN**, OUR VANISHING TRICERATOPS BY **JOE PUMILIA & STEVEN UTLEY** THE RECRUITER BY **GLEN COOK**, and many other new stories and features.



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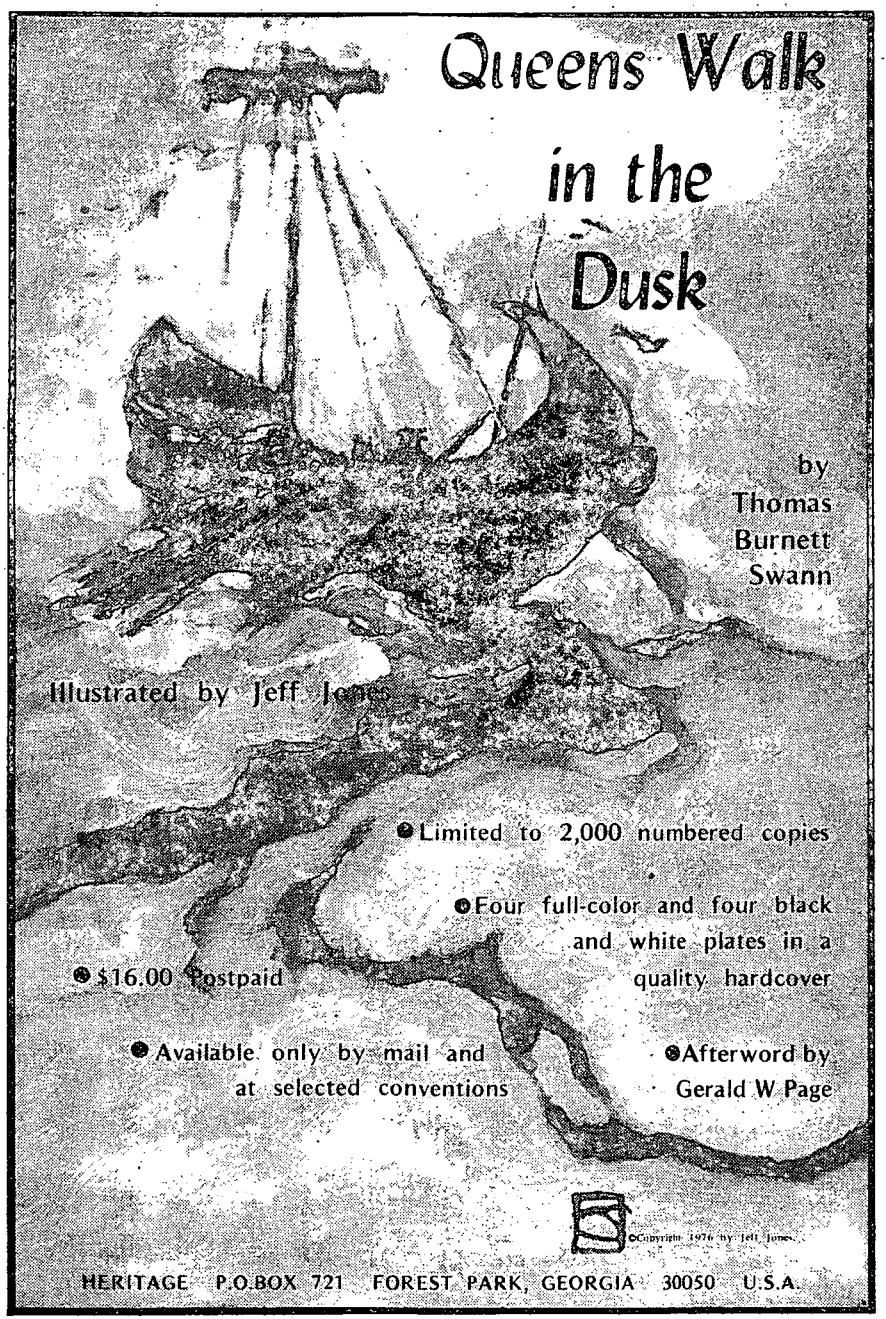
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*Susan Doenim made her debut here ("Timmy Was Eight," Feb., 1972) while still a highschool student, and published her second story ("Heartburn in Heaven," Jan., 1974) after becoming a college drop-out. In the ensuing years, she tells us, "I had a fling at declaming poetry (not all of it mine) in the few remaining coffeehouses devoted to such things, had a baby, and went back to college, this time to learn what I was interested in . . ." Although "I don't think of myself as a writer any more—I realize now that was just my adolescent fantasy," Susan intends to continue writing stories "just once in a while," and gives us this time a story about—*

# THE STUFF OF LEGEND

## SUSAN DOENIM

### Illustrated by Laurence Kamp

I CAN CLOSE MY EYES right now and see the ship, a tall, slender ship of silver-colored metal standing on the grassy plain. We had roared down out of that planet's blue sky, scattering the shaggy-haired primitives with our thunder and our flames. Once on the planet's surface, of course, we had little to do other than program analyses and code the results. There was none of the individual research and specialized discovery that occupied the early series of survey teams. I was a junior communications officer at this time, the youngest woman on the team. I received more than my share of attention from the others for this reason, but because of my own personal ambitions I rejected all their advances, over and over, time after time. That in itself led to part of the problem, I suppose. In those days I might have thought it was just a petty annoyance, but now, in retrospect, I have to wonder about what really motivates people, myself included. It took one of those damned primitives to make me think, too. That's a hard thing to admit.

The ship was silver-colored metal. I said that before, and I suppose it sounds rather ignorant for someone who's gone out to the stars and seen what I've seen. It isn't, not really; I don't suppose that there were two of the twelve of us on that survey who could name the material our ship's hull was made of. Or, for that matter, what our clothing was, or what went into the food we ate. None of these things concerned us and, as the years on this peculiar planet went by, we found more intriguing ways to pass the time. We had to.

I can recall a day, shortly before we were due to leave that world. My labors for that day had been pretty well completed. I spent the morning



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examining the surrounding plain. By this time I was no longer startled to see a blue sky, although it never ceased to be unpleasant. I got used to seeing the sun rise in the east, and the sight of a solitary but gigantic moon. We had been on this world for over nine of its own years, a little less than eleven of ours. I had not traveled more than a thousand miles from the ship in any direction, although my superiors on board had indulged their curiosity across the face of the entire planet. On this day, I'm remembering, I sat before one of the smaller scanners, getting a three hundred sixty-degree picture of the area. Sure, the ship was masked from the sight of the primitives, and we had all manner of trickeries to use ourselves, when we walked among them; but, routine was routine, and Commander Chuss' idea was that without my nonsensical duties, I'd go mad even quicker. So I stared at the green-tinted screen.

Our ship had landed on a small bulge of land, a kind of stumpy peninsula. We had thrown up a magnetic shield immediately, of course, and no primitive ever came near us. The ship was invisible, to their eyes as well as ours, when we were in the field. So I didn't expect to see much that morning. Nothing moved but the brown weeds around us and the hungry sea-birds in that strange blue sky. With the ship as center and a radius of a few miles, a circular patch of that world passed across the scanner's face. From the grass, the picture moved northeastward, across a rocky, barren area. North and slightly west of that was the foul-smelling fortified village of the primitives. Directly north of the ship was a small hilly stretch between the village and the ragged coastline;

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then a long purple expanse of sea, beaten into froth by the winds; then, continuing in the circle west and south, a small island, unpopulated and uninviting; the coast of the peninsula again; the same grassy region, though on the west side of the ship this time; then the southwest coast of the peninsula, where primitives had beached their small, unsteady boats, I recall seeing the temporary dwellings of the boatmen, although I couldn't make out individual figures. Around in the circle the scanner moved, back to its starting point, the same peaceful, infinitely boring section of grassland. I was annoyed by the silence and the emptiness, a feeling that had been growing in me for many, many months, and I jabbed the off-button with my thumb. I yawned and stood up, trying to figure what I'd do for the rest of the day.

I was hungry, and while I sat in the refectory eating a sandwich, Bauler came in. He was the ship's physician, also doubling as ethnographer, particularly interested in the rudimentary folk art forms of the primitives, which I always found somewhat repellent. Bauler was younger than I, and very intelligent and good-looking; I think it was he who most made me regret my vows of celibacy. In any event, on this day he joined me for lunch, as bored with his job as I was with mine. He suggested we take up our game where we had left it several days before.

"Fine," I said. "I'm done for the day already. I'm sick and tired of staring at that damned plain."

"Me, too," said Bauler, yawning. "I think it's your move, isn't it? Let's go find Eerch and Urram. I believe I'll go crazy by supper time if we don't get outside today."

I finished my meal, and Bauler and I dropped by the quarters of Eerch and Urram. The four of us gathered our equipment and signed out with the officer of the watch. We had about six hours of free time until the evening council. I was excited about getting back to our contest; it was, after all, my turn to make the day's first action. I had had it planned for a long while.

To pass the time in the several long years, our survey team had taken to manipulating the minds and lives of the primitives. We walked among them, disguised in whatever manner we chose with the aid of our pocket-fields and hyps, and we came to know the primitives even better through the game than we did through the official studies. During the first year of our stay we had formed parties; some of our team favored the more home-loving primitives in the village, some of us were partial to the elemental, almost bestial shipmen by the water. A few of us, including Commander Chuss, thought the idea of interfering with the primitives was counter-productive to our survey. Still, it was the only entertainment we had and the commander had to condone it, even though he took no real part in it himself.

On the most recent day of my competition our pawns, the brutish shipmen, had eliminated the walled village's most powerful defender. I had been elated; now was the time to make the final stroke that would win the game finally for my party. I was somewhat nervous, I guess, as Urram and I discussed strategy, while we strolled through the knee-high grass toward the camp of the shipmen. Eerch and Bauler had left us, to go into the village of their pieces. Urram described to me the activities of Eerch and Bauler on the previous



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night; I had not been able to play because of my duty schedule.

"It looked bad, for a while," said Urram. He was much younger than I, and a subordinate to me in my department. "After they finished wailing over their dead hero in the village, Eerch led them on a raid against our pieces. The villagers almost got all the way, nearly burned our entire camp. But it was late, and when it got dark they all went back to their homes."

"I hear that Bauler brought in some more new pieces the other day," I said. We had covered about half the distance to the shipmen's camp. Our primitives dwelt in a mountainous land some hundreds of miles to the west of this peninsula. They had come in their small ships across the distance, united in anger and outrage over the abduction of the wife of one of their tribal chieftains. In the years in which we'd been observing them, the members of our team had been frequently told by the primitives that our ways were difficult to understand. That, of course, did not surprise us. What did hurt our self-esteem, however, was the fact that we could oftentimes not decipher *their* motives. Even with the best linguistic analyzers, human and electronic, we continually stumbled on concepts that were simply accepted by the primitives, and which we have never yet begun to unravel. One of these is the idea of "fidelity". It is hard to imagine any of our peoples becoming aroused to war on the account of a woman having intercourse with a man. Occasionally I tried to reason with the primitives, tried to grasp their meaning. The brutes expressed shock at my inability to understand them, and horror at the suggestions I made for simplifying their lives. I soon gave this up. "Fidelity". The word implies ownership and subservience. A primitive notion, but one that instigated interesting events among the planet's tribes. That's certainly more than what was happening with us.

"Bauler brought in some reinforcements while you were busy," said Urram. "He found an army of black-skinned men from Continent C, south and west of here. You'll have to be careful, Attein. Their leader has already killed off a bunch of our best."

The sun overhead was growing uncomfortably hot. I touched on the pocket-field's cooling system. I wished that I could have done something about changing the color of that sky. I never, never got used to it. "Well," I said, "how's our hero?"

"Better," said Urram. "He's not happy at all, but that hasn't made any difference before. I thought he was our best choice against this black army."

"He's always our best choice, out there head-to-head," I said. When we were close enough to hear the sounds of the shipmen, we made ourselves invisible and inaudible. We walked among those intolerably filthy men—I call them men; Commander Chuss prefers the word "creatures"—and incited them with hyped suggestions. In a little while the shipmen formed up their battle lines and started out across the plain, toward the fortified village. I could see that Eerch and Bauler had done the same for their pieces. I walked beside our greatest warrior, whose name in the language of the primitives was Achilles; I whispered to him and strengthened his confidence. I appeared to him in the form of an elderly chieftain whose counsel carried great weight. The reason it had such influence was that its speaker was generally myself. By the time the two armies had come within



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spear-range, Achilles had been worked up into a passionate fury. He went after the gigantic leader of the black-skinned army. My skill and Achilles' combined to defeat the newcomer, who was of course controlled by Eerch. The villagers' army was routed, and ran back in ragged retreat toward their walls. The shipmen followed, screaming taunts and insults; Achilles, Urram, and I led our forces.

Almost had them, too, damn it. Urram and I were winded by the time we got there. Achilles was known among both armies for his fleetness of foot, you know. I never had that reputation. Urram kept up pretty well, but I didn't get there until most of the shipmen's army had run by, shouting. From the rear, it seemed that Achilles was singlehandedly defeating the whole force of the villagers. This was, I learned, part of a trap set up by Eerch and Bauler. The villagers fell back, and fell back, and Achilles followed, right up to the very walls of the village. There, Eerch made his play. He had one of the villagers shoot an arrow. I could see, from a great distance, that the arrow was aimed well. I yelled to Urram to do something. I was still too far away. Urram turned aside the arrow in its path, but Bauler must have anticipated exactly what my ally was going to do; Bauler twisted the arrow in the air, and it struck Achilles in the foot. Our hero fell to the ground like a discarded paper cup. There was instant silence. The shipmen just stopped in their tracks and stared. The villagers couldn't believe their "fortune." Achilles made the only sounds, pitiable choking noises as the arrow's poison—a gift to the villagers from Bauler—rounded through his bloodstream.

"That's it, Attein!" shouted Eerch to me. "That's all for your Achilles!"

I didn't know what to do, so I froze both armies in place. "Enough," I said.

"All right," said Bauler. "We'll come back later." The shipmen and the villagers would stand suspended until we did. Dismayed, I joined Urram and we walked slowly back toward the ship. All the way, we had to put up with the gloating of Eerch. I really hated that man. We all did.

I went straight to my quarters when we reached the ship. I was a little depressed by the turn of events; after all, for a while there it looked like we were going to win the whole game. Instead, our best piece was taken. He was still frozen, of course, and theoretically I had time to figure out a way to save him, but I knew it wouldn't work. The day passed; supper was as bland and unattractive as always, the evening meeting was deadly. Afterward, when it had grown dark, when I often walked down to the ships of my primitives, I went out to the plain. Both armies stood as we had left them. Urram went with me, and we visited Achilles. There was something about that cruel, murderous primitive that had always fascinated me; it was Achilles that had drawn me into the game, had kept me in it after others of the survey team had grown bored and quit.

Urram brought Achilles out of the temporal freeze. The primitive's agony was supreme, although it was difficult to empathize with him. He was, as the commander often claimed, very close to a mere beast. What interested me, more than anything else, was the coincidental appearance of the primitives' culture to our ancient ancestors on our own planet, revealed to us in the writings of the philosopher-king Herodes Chrysanax



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and the epic poet, Polyglenos. How often in those millenia-old stories, the "gods" of our primitive forefathers spoke directly to their worshippers. And now, these shipmen addressed me in the same way; of course, I must have appeared to be a goddess to them.

"Gray-eyed Athena, do not let me die," whispered Achilles when he regained consciousness.

"I'm doing my best," I said. "I can't promise anything."

"But aren't you all-powerful?" asked the tormented primitive.

"I am," I said. "But so are Ares and Apollo. The matter is in the hands of the All-Father." I, of course, was "Athena" in their language. Eerch became Ares, Bauler was Apollo. Urram was contorted in their rough dialect into Hermes. I suppressed a shudder when I said "All-Father". The concept was unpleasant, but we had to maintain certain illusions. Achilles meant Commander Chuss, I guess; we often referred to him as our superior, and the primitives naturally ascribed to him the greatest of supernatural powers. They worshipped him as Zeus.

My primitive was writhing on the ground. Tears ran down his cheeks, but he did not scream out loud. His pain would grow, thanks to Bauler's poison, until death took Achilles at last. Even though this creature meant nothing to me, other than a source of amusement, I recall being upset and a little squeamish about his death struggle. "Hermes will watch you," I told the primitive.

"Do not leave me, goddess," said Achilles softly. "Don't abandon me to the guide of the dead."

"Your great hero is afraid," said Eerch's gutteral voice behind me.

"I think he's justified," said Urram.

"Tell me," said Eerch, in the language of the primitives, "why are you clinging to a life that has not given you anything worth clinging to?"

"I am not yet finished," said Achilles. His breathing had become shallow and rapid. It was evident that he didn't have much more time.

"It looks to me as though you are finished," said Eerch, laughing. "It doesn't make much difference what *you* think."

"Shut up, Eerch," I said.

Eerch looked startled. He grabbed my arm roughly and turned me to face him. "All right," he said, "I want you to pay attention. You are not some great, wonderful goddess. Maybe all these primitives burning sacrifices to you has gone to your head. You're just a junior communications officer. Or perhaps you don't like to remember that. You can't treat me like one of these mindless animals. If you want to run lives, stick with these creatures. But if you talk to me like that again, like you were the great virgin princess or something, you're going to get knocked on your back. And I won't have to tell you what comes after that."

"That's enough," said Urram.

I didn't say anything. After all, it was common knowledge in the team that I had once beaten Eerch at his own game, in a bout with the long, padded clubs that he favored. I had thrashed him badly, so painfully that he couldn't leave his quarters for three days afterward. Instead of ending his threats and insults, the affair had just made him more irritating.

"Noble Ares," said Achilles. After these words, the primitive stopped. His pain was obvious. A thin trickle of blood began to flow from the corners of his mouth. His body convulsed, but still he struggled to speak. "Noble Ares of the red hands, although you



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favor my Trojan enemies, you must understand what it is that I seek. This is not the way for a warrior to die, with a poison-smeared wound in the foot. I pray to live, so that I may clash again my spear against the strong-greaved Trojans, race with them until I prevail, and stand in the front of the Achaeans in valor and courage."

Urram looked bewildered. "Valor and courage mean nothing," he said. "At the end, all there is is death."

"No," said Achilles as forcefully as he could. He began to choke on his own blood. Finally, his spasms subsided. "Just before the end, there is death. What comes after, the true end, is eternity. I must win that. I must conquer that."

Eerch laughed loudly. I just shook my head. I could not understand.

"Attein, listen," said Eerch in an annoying tone of voice. "Look, if you're such a great field general, you ought to risk something of your own. Then you could maybe identify with your pieces." He nudged the shaking body of Achilles with his boot.

"What do you mean?" I asked, knowing what he meant. He only laughed. "And what if I win?" I said. "What will you give me?" He made an obscene gesture and turned his back, laughing again and walking away toward our silver ship.

"Is there anything you can do for the primitive?" I asked Urram.

"Nothing," said my partner. "I can keep him alive as long as I want, up to a certain point. But he'll just suffer here. He wouldn't be any good to us at all. Bauler could fix him up now, maybe, but even that's doubtful. This piece is pretty well lost. All that's keeping him going is my pocket-field. Without it, he'd be dead already."

I chewed my lip, looking down at the primitive, Achilles. His face was white, and his fists clenched and unclenched spasmodically. "Freeze him," I said. "I don't want to watch him any more." Urram put the primitive back in the temporal freeze, with the remainder of the two armies. Then he and I followed Eerch across the moonlit plain to the ship.

Urram and I went to the refectory and sat drinking coffee for a short while. Bauler joined us, and we talked about other matters. Even though the game was the single most important factor in our lives on this world, we rarely discussed the happenings on the battlefield at other times; we had our identities as players, but they were separate from our roles as members of the survey team. I had no feeling of animosity toward Bauler, even though he was responsible for the destruction of my best piece. That was, after all, one of his reasonable objectives. And, too, only a few days before, we had taken his Hector, the Trojans best piece. I'm sure that Urram didn't even connect Bauler's presence in the refectory with what had happened on the plain.

Only one of us seemed to carry over the same personality, the same motivations on the plain and in the ship—Eerch. That was what made him so ugly. That manner of his wasn't appropriate either place.

"Have you heard about our problem?" asked Bauler.

"What problem?" said Urram.

"Oh, the commander received orders from home yesterday," said Bauler. "He's trying to decide the best way to break the news to us."

"Oh, no," I said. "That sounds bad. I think I can guess."

"Sure," said Bauler. "They want us to stay."



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"It's that civilization we found on Continent E," said Urram. "I'll bet they want us to do a summary there, just like we did here."

"They wouldn't dare," I said. "Another ten years? They have to know we couldn't take it."

"Oh, they don't particularly care," said Bauler. "After all, they're sitting at home. They just know that it sounds stupid to send another team out, as long as we're already here."

"And the game's coming to a close," said Urram. "In a while, we won't even have that." Bauler and I just nodded. No one said anything for a moment. I thought about what we'd done to the primitives.

There were many concepts that governed the creatures' lives which we couldn't comprehend; I mentioned the term "fidelity", which the primitives used in speaking about their wives and their friends. Along with fidelity came such ideas as "loyalty", attachment to immaterial forms such as "home", "government", and so on. The difficulty with this kind of irrational thought is that it is often self-generating: given the acceptance of the previous terms, others follow quickly. "Devotion to duty", for example, which in the minds of the primitives was equal to "Blind adherence to a single set of instructions, even should those instructions fail to apply to a changing context."

And then there was Achilles. He mentioned "valor and courage." Urram replied that valor and courage mean nothing. They mean nothing to us, of course, and it is still only tenuously that I can grasp what the primitives meant by these terms. "Valor" seems to indicate "foolhardiness which nevertheless wins the respect (!) of friend and enemy." I am aware of the ridiculous quality of that idea, but the primitives seemed oblivious to the contradictory nature of most of their cherished ideals.

When our own ancient poet, Polyglenos, sang of these same notions, his audience, our own ancestors, understood him well enough. Even today his epic narrations stir in us a strange kind of awe. I always believed that this feeling was merely an appreciation of how far our race has developed since those days many centuries ago. But I experienced the same emotions while I stood there, staring down at the dying primitive. How similar our own Memnarian forefathers seem to these alien creatures. Can it be that, with our help, the primitives on that distant world may someday achieve our own level of culture? In that case, perhaps Commander Chuss was perfectly correct in discouraging our meddling with their affairs. What a horrible gift to our offspring, if these primitives should drop down out of our sky, twenty or thirty centuries from now. And all because we started them on the path to technological civilization.

And if we did, in fact, grant this award to the primitives, what did we receive in return? Mysteries. Strange ideas. More odd, quirky thoughts than I shall ever be able to assimilate in my lifetime.

I was brought out of my reflections by Urram's sigh. "We just can't go on," he said.

"The game doesn't have to end, of course," said Bauler.

"No, but it will get boring, just like everything else," said Urram.

"I'm weary of the war already," I said.

"Well, then," said Bauler, "no more wars. Let's just pick on one of the primitives, choose sides, and use him as a pawn. Focus on the best



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that's left after this war ends."

"We'll talk about it," I said. I had little hope, at that time. I still didn't see anything especially wrong in manipulating those creatures; but, I suppose, the words and attitudes of Achilles were beginning to change my outlook. He was cruel, of course, murderous, self-centered, and incapable of genuine rational thought. Nevertheless, he showed me something when he confronted Eerch. I couldn't decide then just what it was, and I can't articulate it any better now. But I still feel it just as strongly.

I slept well that night, and the next morning I awoke reluctantly, to go back to my short hours of work for the survey. That passed quickly, as it had the day before, and I went to lunch wondering how I could hope to keep my sanity on this planet much longer. I ate alone; the schedules of Bauler and Urram conflicted with mine, and we couldn't get together again for at least two days more. I thought about asking permission from Commander Chuss to take a survey flier and go on leave of absence, anywhere on that world that I hadn't seen before. I put my request in writing and turned it in to his lieutenant. Then I got my equipment together for a walk on the plain. I had a few hours free, and I signed out.

The day was colder than usual, and the sky was gray and dark. I felt a light, misty rain falling as I walked back toward the frozen armies. Achilles lay just where we had left him, his deanimated body twisted in a suspended moment of agony. I brought him back to consciousness, feeling for the first time a kind of regret that by doing so, I would have to bring him back to his pain. But I knew that very soon Achilles would be dead, once and for all beyond the reach of our sophisticated technology, and I would never again hear the foreign, slightly evil, slightly noble thoughts that he treasured even so near death.

"I beg you, fair Athena," said Achilles, his voice hoarse and so low that I could barely hear it without amplification from my pocket-field. "When I die, take my soul. Cheat grim Hades. Place me under your protection, that I may spend eternity in worthy combat on your sacred island of Leuce. Let me pass those unending days with my comrades, with Patroclus and Ajax, who yet lives, and the greatest of my Trojan foes."

"Why?" I asked, tired and puzzled.

"Honor," said Achilles. "That is all there is."

"What do you mean by 'honor'?" I asked.

The primitive sighed. "When cowardly Thersites died, no one but great Diomedes, his cousin, wept at the funeral pyre."

Sometimes, as here, Achilles' words sound not only bizarre, but absolutely foolish. I said nothing, although I'm sure the final ravings of a primitive creature did not stir much in the way of sympathy within me. My silence was for other reasons.

Eerch came close to me then. He put one arm around my shoulders. I shrugged away from him and spat at his feet; he laughed. "You remember how this stinking thing disgraced the corpse of my best pawn? Well, we'll see what my creatures do to your great Achilles. You remember what this beast did to the corpse of that woman? That Amazon I brought in for reinforcement? After he killed her, he stripped her armor, remember? Then do you recall what he did to her dead body? Wait until my villagers get hold of your savage hero. I admit that I don't know what he means by 'honor'.



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But from the sound of it, I'd swear he doesn't really understand, either."

"He has a better idea than you," I said. I promised myself that, even if it cost me the game, I was going to keep the corpse of Achilles out of the Trojans' hands. My thoughts were interrupted by a shrill cry from the primitive. I looked down, horrified by the sound. Achilles' face was contorted, but still. His eyes were covered with milky film. He was dead.

We fought then, Eerch and I; his Trojans, resurrected from their temporal freeze, and my Achaeans. He and I, without Bauler and Urram, guided our armies, struggled through the entire rest of the day as though the crazy battle meant something. At last I prevailed, and Achilles' stiff corpse was carried back to the camp of the shipmen. Eerch laughed and shrugged, and we froze our armies again. There would be time the next day to continue the war. Or the day after that.

That night, after supper, after the daily meeting, I sat alone in my quarters and thought. I hated Eerch, more than I had ever felt any emotion for any person. This was a sign of my growing madness, I suppose; and so, too, was the feeling that we on the survey team, with all our wonders, were less than the primitive brutes who served us as playthings. I felt that we had lost something since the days of our ancestors, since the Golden Age of King Herodes and the poet Polyglenos. This was the first symptom of my dissatisfaction and my madness. We had lost something, I knew, and what we had lost might have been loyalty, valor, and honor.

—SUSAN DOENIM

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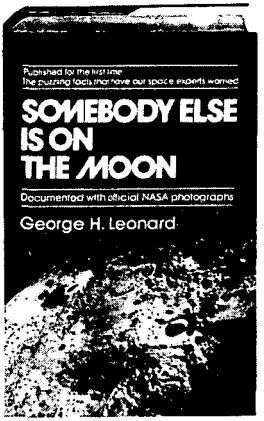
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# MIASMAS—A LIFE TERM

## WILLIAM NABORS

*Bill Nabors' previous contributions to these pages—"The State of Ultimate Peace" (March, 1974) and "Goodbye Joe Quietwater—Hello!" (June, 1975)—presage the satirically jaundiced eye he casts upon Mortimer Sternglass and his unusual fate:*

## Illustrated by TONY GLEESON

1. *Crimes*

MORTIMER STERNGLASS's mother deserted him when he was only two days old. Sadly, it affected him. Mortimer's father died on Mortimer's nineteenth birthday. Mortimer was quietly plagued by the consequences, for he inherited everything the old man owned: the old man's business, the old man's house, the old man's mistress and the old man's rut. His wishes, Mortimer concluded, had come abundantly true. He swallowed a handful of Tums. He pinched himself. "No guilt? Emmm—emmm—ahh! *No guilt!*"

Mortimer breathed a relieved sigh and savored the cool tranquility of his gastrointestinal tract. An insurance agency won't run itself. Mortimer farted lavishly and went to work. On the third day of his reign, he began to cough haughtily if anything displeased him. Now, he had everything; his inheritance was complete. For the next nine years collective brows winced whenever Mortimer coughed, just as they had wriggled nervously in obeisance to his father before him.

Almost immediately, Mortimer *knew* he was a born leader. He grew proud. He reflected that this little ceremony of brow raising was not unlike the salutes accorded great military men and public dignitaries. Anytime his ego needed shoring up, Mortimer had only to pace the offices and corridors of the Sternglass Complex; his father's cough at the ready.

Mortimer thought the accolades, brow raising and sniveling obedience, given him by his underlings, confirmation of the theories of his two secret idols, Dr.s Pavlov and Goebbels. Did not brows raise as they had been conditioned? Did pleasant smiles not curl into self doubts at Mortimer's approach? Were there not inner tremblings over projected errors and improprieties that might not be the "Sternglass Way"? Year after year, did not migraine headaches wind up the leading cause of absence among his employees? Had his flock not petitioned him to install Tums dispensers on every floor of the complex?

*Pride!* Mortimer felt it swell up in him. When questioned by other eager young men concerning his attainments, Mortimer would breathe deeply and say, "Confidence! Confidence is my secret." And thus secure



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in his reign, Mortimer gave up cigarettes, which he'd begun at the advanced age of seven and began to puff cigars, as many as ten a day. Not only did they irritate surrounding nostrils, they set Mortimer apart from other men. He was a success. He had assurance. The inordinately long cigars were his talisman; his coat of arms. So Mortimer puffed his way through his tiny kingdom, frowning here, patting backs and butts and shoulders there, smiling, shaking his head in utter dismay and contempt; writing rapidly in a small brown notebook his employees called the "Doomsday Book."

Mortimer had found his element. His existence, his firm; everything in his life became a pavlovian experiment. Everyone was vulnerable, Mortimer concluded, except himself—Mortimer the controller—the powerful. *"I am!"* The very sound pleased Mortimer, *"I am!"* He reflected on that astounding conclusion. "Why, I'm a little god here. Hee, Hee! Mortimer at the helm! By God, at least a king." And he made a cloud of cigar smoke and laughed uproariously and put out a memorandum—"Pay increases are due those employees who have worked so hard this year to make the Sternglass Insurance Company the foremost in the Southeast . . ."And they waited and they waited and they waited. Then, they waited some more. And then, Mortimer, at his leisure, put out another memorandum—"Employees who did not receive the recent pay increase and bonuses should not be concerned about their status with this firm. It was a reflection on no one's abilities, if a raise or bonus was not due. Rather, excellence was rewarded." And Mortimer sniggered and wondered how many of them had spent the elu-

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sive coin, and what his next glorious experiment might be.

But for all his vision, delusion if you prefer, Mortimer was not quite the power he imagined himself. He was not omnipotent. As he approached his twenty-eight birthday, he began to experience a vague guilt. Assurance waned a little. Sometimes he felt weak; almost helpless. It frightened him. With Sandra, his mistress, who had come with everything else, Mortimer was especially inept. She was five years his senior and infinitely more experienced in matters of the flesh than was Mortimer. In addition, her beauty undermined Mortimer's fruitless attempts to control her the way he did everyone else around him. Mortimer even suspected her of having read his great Dr.s' works and was only satisfied that this was not the case when he learned that Sandra did not read at all and that this was one of the primary reasons his father had orginally chosen her. "Yo' dad," she told Mortimer, "always say they's nothin' wors'n a smart educated nigger, 'ceptin' a smart educated nigger 'hoa'."

But still she tantalized Mortimer. His consumption of cigars rose astronomically. He purchased cases of Tums and drank Maalox like wine with all his meals. She drove Mortimer to the jagged boundaries of torment. He could not shake her security. He neglected his other experiments, his life's work, to stay home to devote more time to the problem of Sandra. And still she refused to cringe. She rang the bells. Mortimer did the salivating. She made Mortimer want to abdicate his power and huddle in the sweet security of her big luscious breasts, like the dull frightened runt from a populous litter of pigs.

And it was his insatiable desire for just such a relationship that drove Mortimer to try to exasperation to break Sandra's will; to create a slavering dependence in her. "What becomes of women like you," Mortimer would ask in practiced innocence, "when they get too old for it?"

"Don't rightly know, Mista Mortimer. Jennie Wash'ton that kept with your dad 'fo' me, she reti'ed down to Miami, didn't she? Left your dad them di'ries o'hers! He set Jennie up right nice. I bet them was some books. 'O' course I can't 'rite none myself. I jus' talks!"

*Helplessness.* Mortimer understood the word. He even understood the dream. His old man running naked through the house, screaming, *"Retribution!"* Sandra after him with the straight razor, cursing violently, threatening to cut off the old man's nuts. Mortimer cowering in a corner, a child, shaking fearfully as he watches her operate on the old man, thinking—if she can do that to him—screaming—waking—and there she is, Sandra, caressing his puny little organ. *Helplessness.* He looks at her. "Why, Mr. Mortimer, you been cryin' in your sleep." She kisses him gently. The dream is almost forgotten.

It must be love, Mortimer concluded. What else could be so crippling? And then he remembered his proposal. *Humiliation!* He had come home in triumph. Old Matthew Clegger had quit his job, trembling, begging, whining for Mortimer to please let him go. Not to come after him. He couldn't go on. "The pressure, pressure Mr. Sternglass. An old man like me." Mortimer had written at length in his secret volume describing his experiment on Clegger. He had simply increased the old man's work load a little at a time until finally he



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cracked. Mortimer was ecstatic with victory and certain he could turn the tables on Sandra—subtly break her will. He had found the perfect stimulus—her motherhood. "Miss Sandra," he began, "that boy, Morty. No doubt he's yours and dad's but it doesn't look quite right, him being here—us together. I think I will have to find a good school for him up north. No one will tell him he's a half white bastard up there. Yes, unless you have a better solution, Morty will have to go."

He waited for her to plead, to give him his victory; for mother love to bind her. He would be magnanimous. He would say Morty could stay. She would realize her place. *"Sold down the Mississippi."* A phrase from history. Feelings of brotherly love vaguely teased him. He laughed. His confidence expanded. Wine, he thought, wine for a private triumph.

"Mista Mortimer, we'll leave when you're ready. *Me* and Morty."

Mortimer's stomach howled with renewed fever. Another day ruined. The threat of unbearable loss. *"Sold down the Mississippi."* The marriage proposal driveled from his mouth. He would make her an honest woman. He begged. He pleaded. He trembled and whined. Later, he could not forget it. She had defied and then dared to deny him. Turned him down! *Abandonment.* He knew its depths. He felt its absolute sense of barren desertion. Mortimer Sternglass had been deserted, defied; not merely by his Sandra but also by his great Dr.s. "Oh Pavlov! Oh Goebbels! Oh God!" Mortimer paced the halls of the complex. Stomped. Raved at the tearing rejection. Fought vigorously to be restored in his own esteem; even promised himself to go home and throw the bitch and that eleven year old black version of his old man out the back door.

But he could not do it. He failed completely with every other woman he tried to have sex with. Oh Dr.s, Mortimer Sternglass, descendent of Klansmen—founding Klansmen—could not even get an erection without his black Sandra.

He wondered if she knew; if the whole black mass of Orlando knew. Oh Dr.s! Mortimer, your own champion, now become dependent slave of your observations and techniques; bonded to this terrible, this beautiful razor-wielding black wench.

But did she know? Did she know the magnitude of his failures? Had her uneducated spirit caught his vitals, found him out? When Morty his eleven year old mirror said, "Mornin' soul brother," did the sarcasm extend even beyond the knowledge the little boy had grasped about their common lineage? Mortimer knew the horror of the slobbering unappeased mutt. *Ding! Ding! Ding!* The questions tingled in his soul. No answers rushed forth to greet them, only anxious trembling anticipation. Mortimer magnified the terror of a vital lie undressed. He searched frantically for a way to control her mind. He reread the great Dr.s' works. He even consulted B. F. Skinner. His reign had been spoiled. He turned at last to the yellow pages. Mortimer needed help. He rang up Freudians, Jungians, behaviorists, men of all faiths. Alas, the hour was late. Busy signals, endless ringing; silences and recorded messages. Mortimer despaired. Then he spotted it, a tiny business card taped to the plastic cover on the telephone book. Mortimer read the inscription, A. JONES—CONSULTATIONS & ARRANGEMENTS.



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## II. *Exorcisms*

A MAN NAMED Jones must find some means to distinguish himself or he will not only be irretrievably lost in the gurgling billions that make up the human mass, but the silent majority of Joneses as well. Arthur Jones is a cab driver and he understands this problem. You might even say that he created and solved it for himself. You see, Arthur is no ordinary cab driver. He is no ordinary Jones. Arthur is a Jones among Joneses. There is a couch in the rear of his cab and he carries a burden of existential responsibility that would choke a saint. He knows nearly everyone in town and holds in confidence things that priests, bartenders, lawyers, analysts, bell boys, cops, undertakers, prostitutes and other cab drivers approach, but never fully grasp. Arthur has the advantage over these other servants of mankind, for the simple reason that he is not a mere vicarious participant in the human foibles he encounters. Arthur is actively engaged. He provides not only counsel but transportation, physical and metaphysical. Those who come to him are not merely taken for a ride prostrate forlornly on the couch in the rear of his cab. They are on the throes of metamorphoses, for Arthur never fails. All of his fares reach a destination. Each realizes his ultimate potential as a human being. If Arthur does not succeed therapeutically, or if he deems the potential he uncovers undesirable, he has other, harsher means to effect his cures. Arthur can be tranquilly ruthless, for he knows that he is making a world; populating it with fares renewed spiritually—cured of all crippling anxieties and fears. It is his responsibility, this world, and he accepts the burden much as would a deity who could never settle for a second rate creation, while a first rate one was still possible. Arthur, nihilist and idealist, cares; cures. When the phone rings in his cab, whatever the circumstances, he is ready to serve; he is the Lone Ranger of analysis and the Gunga Din of cab driving. He will take any case, "any case," he proudly tells anyone who will listen.

And so when the call came, Arthur, rather than make a liar of himself, was compelled, even though he sensed the fare could be terminal, to go forthwith to the corner of Orange Avenue and Church Street to pick up Mortimer Sternglass who had called, Arthur noted in his farebook, in obvious desperation.

"Mr. Sternglass, I presume." Arthur grinned widely and opened the back door of his cab. Mortimer was shocked. He didn't know what to make of the couch.

"Sir . . ."

"A little surprised, Mr. Sternglass? Well, my fares, my patients," Arthur said as he flipped on the meter, "usually are a little uneasy at first, but fear not. That uneasiness will evaporate. All uneasiness will evaporate. You have chosen well in coming to me. Chosen well—"

"Damn it, your card! Consultations and Arrangements! I thought you . . ." Mortimier began angrily and went blank.

MORTIMER AWOKE. He felt more peaceful than he could ever remember feeling. Sandra sat at the foot of their bed, dressed for the day and sipping her second cup of coffee. "What happened," Mortimer asked, surprised at his lack of real concern.

"Thought you knowed, Mista Mortimer, Dr. Jones brought you home. You was talkin' mighty nice; mighty happy; nice to us all and generous. You give Morty ten dollars. And sweet Mista Mortimer. I never seen



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you so sweet. And—"

"Goddamnit! Where is Jones?" Mortimer jumped out of bed. Now, he was concerned. Sweet! "Where is that son of a bitch." Just as suddenly his anger dissipated. Peace descended on him again. He reached for a cigar. He didn't want it. He began to prepare his morning enema. But before he could find the epsom salts, nature called. A miracle. Mortimer farted. For once he got something besides hot air. *Relief.* Mortimer wanted to do something physical. He felt well. He wanted to thank Jones.

"Mista Mortimer," Sandra interrupted. "Dr. Jones lef this note."

Mortimer took it eagerly. "Meter reading—$78.90—next appointment 11:00 p.m. tomorrow night—I will take delivery at the Uninhibited Art League on Colonial Drive—Be prompt—Payment for first session to be made before second session is underway—you are under the influence of a temporary elixir—you are not well—Beware—A. JONES.

THE SIGN flashed nervously. THRILLS—SPECIAL ITEMS—FILMS—XXXXXX—UNINHIBITED EROTIC VOLUMES OF YOUR CHOICE—MAGAZINES!

Mortimer stood in the rain observing the clientele of the Uninhibited Art League. He was more than an hour early for his appointment with Jones and already he was anxious. Peace had evaporated. He cursed Jones. He paced. He began to crave cigars. The memory of his defeat, his abandonment; what Sandra was doing to his confidence, all of it closed in on him. His stomach flamed. He let farts and belched spasmodically. Tums! He'd sell his soul for a Tum. He bounded in the door. "Tums please," he told the thin old woman behind the counter.

"Got no Tums," she said.

"There!" Mortimer pointed to a box of Tums enclosed in the glass case.

"Got no Tums," said the old woman as she stared down at the box, a pleasant smile across her lips. "Got no Tums; got no Tums for sale."

Mortimer grew desperate. He grabbed a handful of cigars from the open box on top of the counter. "Tums, goddamnit!" He stepped away from the counter and waved the cigars threateningly.

"Shut up buddy," came a voice from behind a book rack.

Mortimer turned to give an enraged reply. *ANAL HOLIDAYS! FLAMING PUSSY! WICKED SECRETS OF THE NYMPHO AND THE SNAKE! 10,000 PERVERSIONS: THE REPORT OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON PERVERSION!* Mortimer gazed into faces oblivious to everything but titilating print and photographs. "Pavlov!" Mortimer turned and kicked in the glass case. "*Tums* wench!" He grabbed the box and ran into the street. He did not hear the shots from the old woman's twenty-two pistol. He ran as he had never ran. He romped instinctively on, farting ceaselessly until he came to Johnny Antony's Pizza House; the best pizza ever conceived by God or Man. Mortimer swallowed two packages of the contraband Tums, lit a cigar and entered. He ordered the "combination." The crust was perfect, texture almost like a cracker. The cheeses were plentiful—mozzarella—swiss—brick—muenster. . . And the sauce—the sauce! Everything to the right degree. Mortimer ate voraciously. He drank giant goblets of Chianti and thirsted for more. He farted. Belched. Popped another pack of *Tums*; left one for the waitress and eased triumphantly out the rear exit—newly lighted cigar burning



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bright.

Fear seized Mortimer—desertion. "Oh, Dr.s, mercy!" He wept and threw away his cigar. Then he spotted it, the orange and blue cab of Arthur Jones, shrouded in fog that steamed profusely from the wet concrete. "You son of a bitch!"

Jones grinned. "Good evening, Mr. Sternglass. Officers," he called, "this is your man."

Two hefty black men in drab green uniforms approached him. ALDEBARAN—SECURITY & COMFORT blazed from their chests. Mortimer screamed. They looked like Jones. They grinned like Jones. Only the skin differentiated them. Mortimer searched for a means of escape. One of the men raised a club. Death! Mortimer stood in frozen horror. They picked him up and carried him to the cab.

"You're tardy, Mr. Sternglass. I require that all my fares keep appointments—circumstances aside."

*The officers laughed in unison.*

"Randolph, please collect Mr. Sternglass's due fare and give him something from the pharmacy—the green elixir—*nostalgia no. 1.* It should suit him well—quite well!

"Black sons of bit . . ."

A green cloud swept over Mortimer—bells—tones of hope—torment; the ticking of a billion clocks, deeds forgot: Mortimer Sternglass, occupied territory of dreams. Focus. Stop. *Silver Bullets*—they led him to his Dr.s. They were responsible for him. *"Hi Yo Silver!"* The bullets had come on Saturday, obliterating the first painful week in Mrs. Barker's first grade. *Remembrance*—Mortimer, smallest student in the school—"Tee-Tiny" his immediate nickname. "Captain" a mammoth gypsy boy, wielder of a switch blade knife, sword length, it looked to Mortimer. "Captain" center of everyone's loving attention, or cringing dread. "Captain!"—First grade combination rasputin—joe louis—einstein—first words to Mortimer after a day of threatening looks and whispers mouthed from afar, "Tee-Tiny, you be my slave." And he was not kidding and certainly not making a request. *Tears!* Mortimer fantasized destruction: the gypsy slicing his throat; hanging his corpse on a coat rack in back of the class, a warning to others defiant of "Captain's" rule. Mortimer allowed to hang for months. Why didn't the teacher notice!

Kick, Mortimer. Flee! Scream—day banging against day like chaotically hung bells. Remember the bullets! Come to rest on a still day, on a still day—"Tee-Tiny!" Infuriation! Was that justice in the shadows? "Cry tee-tiny tattle tale—tee-tiny whiny tattle tale!"

Mortimer craved *Merita.* Mortimer begged to be rocked. Mortimer whined for the teacher's lap. Mortimer demanded infant rights!

"Check his birth certificate! Rich little bastard! Trouble maker. I can tell one right off. Examine him!"

Mortimer hidden. Mortimer lost. *Panic!*

Mortimer found in the furnace room—protected—curled in the lap of his first true love—Annabell Lousia Queen—janitress extraordinaire—waddle of pregnant waddles—mother duck of fourteen with time spared to rock motherless Mortimer Sternglass—"Poor baby got no Mama," she whined at sight of him.

"Annabell! My Annabell—Mama—ma . . ."

Nostalgia 6:00 p.m. The Lone Ranger! "Kids join the Lone Ranger's Safety Club. You'll receive *free,* your official club membership card and mask. Send 25 cents *today.* Receive



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two—*two!* Official Lone Ranger *Silver Bullets*; a mask just like the Ranger's! Don't wait. Write today. Receive the Lone Ranger's safety . . ."

"Jennie! Jennie! Jennie!" Mortimer ran to his father's ever naked, endlessly scribbling mistress. "Jennie, I got to write Ranger—the Lone Ranger." And Jennie hugged him close. She wrote immediately and Mortimer waited ever and ever and ever and ever . . .

"When my silver bullets come," Mortimer whispered about, "I'll take care of Captain."

"Yeah! Silver Bullets—ha! ha! Don't drop Captain's books—Lone Ranger! Tee-Tiny cowboy! Better pay Captain's dime, Kimo Sabe."

Mortimer waited. Mortimer hoped. Mortimer dreamed victory—captain's fleeing image—captain's hands up—captain defeated: *"Say, who was that masked man, anyhow?"*

*"I don't know but he gave me this silver bullet."*

*"Why that must have been the Lone . . ."*

*"Hi Yo Silver!"*

*"Thank you* Tiny Ranger."

Secretly Mortimer doubted his fantasy. Openly he bragged in whispers. And the bullets came on Saturday. Monday, Mortimer went to school. Reality closed in. Mortimer prepared to give the bullets to his Captain—in the name of—friendship of course—only in the name of friendship . . .

But the gypsy didn't come to school Monday. He didn't come to school Tuesday.

"S'scared o' them s'silver bullets," said Randy Smith.

And Mortimer smiled.

*"Kimo Sabe,"* came respectful voices of unity.

Wednesday Becky Smith said, "Where's that chicken gypsy?"

Thursday Mrs. Barker said, "Our classmate, the gypsy boy, won't be back. Who would you like for class monitor?"

"Kimo Sabe! Mortimer—tee-tiny—*Kimo Sabe—Morti* . . ."

Mortimer began to grasp conditioning. The seeds of Pavlov were planted. How many steps to experimental neuroses; to true propaganda—to Goebbels—to Mortimer's own Reichstag fire?

STERNGLASS. Sternglass! *Sternglass!* Mortimer gazed through a green haze. "Randolph, I believe he is ready for *Eros Monogamus*. Take it from the pharmacy and see to it that the young woman has a sniff as well. You and Leroy stay with him. Be unobtrusive as possible and give him this note when he awakes. I hope he finds the meter reading satisfactory. I have other calls—so many others. Careful not to overdose them, Leroy—you know the danger. We don't want to provoke a permanent condition. I can just see our Sternglass going through life with a permanent erection, or that lovely girl in constant heat for only him. That, of course, he would love but it would only serve to perpetuate this horrible maze of manipulations he calls his experiments. No! Give a very small dose, I caution you. Make your presence available. Protect; do not intrude—Security & Comfort."

Jones started the cab. "Oh, Randolph," he called, "one moment! Give the boy Morty this." He handed out a red bubble gum ball. "It's something I've been tinkering with—*The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Treasure Island and Huckleberry Finn*. I hope it doesn't hurt the boy's teeth. Note his reactions please. I've fascinated myself with this one! I can envision it now, a nation gnashing its way through the classics. Ought to make



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Evelyn Wood take notice; lock her bowels at least. And I don't mind telling you the idea of congressmen masticating their 'Congressional Record' has special appeal for me. Of course, there are other concerns, responsibilities, I'm not prepared to take. Imagine the implications of oral pornography or comic books; degenerates chewing on *Naked Lunch* and *Batman*; gnawing into Henry Miller and Goofy. They could even do it in church—bite right into *The Illustrated Karma Sutra* while taking holy communion. I see a chewing gum crisis in the classroom—*Modern Romances* stuck on lunchroom plates and *Playboy* seeping from the roofs of innocent young mouths; stuck behind virgin ears. And what of the sidewalks, all that sticky mess; morning papers spat all over the streets. No, I think I'll hang on to this little innovation. Can you imagine it in the hands of someone like Sternglass's Dr. Goebbels? The world's not ready for this bubble gum. But, it should occupy the boy: an excellent babysitter, I'd say! Careful of Sternglass. Keep your soul on ice.' Remember—"

"Security," said Randolph.

"Comfort," said Leroy.

"Farewell," said Jones.

"EROS MONOGAMUS!" said Randolph.

"Powerful stuff," said Leroy.

"Careful," said Randolph.

"I'll spray lightly," said Leroy. "All the world needs is that honky with a cement prong."

Psst! Psst! Psst! Psss . . .

"Enough, Leroy!"

FLOWER SHADOWS danced on the wall. Mortimer's eyes blinked in the flickering candlelight. He held Sandra's hand and gazed reverently at her nakedness. She smiled at him, almost forgivingly.

*Pleasure! Exhaustion!* It had been a peaceful day; a beautiful day. A guiltless Mortimer Sternglass knew love. He had given himself fully; unashamedly. Love had not cloaked violence. Harmony had transcended mere screwing. His devils were banished from bed; the crowd had thinned. Sandra had been only Sandra—not the mother he'd never known; not scribbling Jennie, not Annabell and not even the unconquered focus of sibling jealousy and Oedipal horror! She had been only herself.

And Mortimer? The Mortimer of *eros monogamus* was not the boy who had seen his dad slipping into Jennie's room garbed in the regalia of Grand Cyclops, his erect organ pointing from a slit in his klan raiment. The Mortimer of *eros monogamus* was definitely not the manipulating son who read Jennie's hidden diaries, laughed, cheered out loud and taunted his father till he received a bank account to replace his demeaning allowance. This sexually liberated Mortimer was not the boy who had seen Sandra rip the robes from his father and make him a humbled old man; a man who lived only for threat of the razor, who lusted for the razor. *"I'll cut you!"* She had only to utter the words and the patriarch of Sternglass's would eat his breakfast without complaint; take his nap on time and not mention his prostate complications for hours.

This Mortimer of *eros monogamus* was not the inept young man whose penis had gone limp in all the best cat houses from Miami to New York; who heard black laughter in his sleep and who dreamed of himself standing in front of a firing squad chosen from the ghetto of Orlando—"GET THAT PRONG UP," blared a loud speaker.

"No use," said Mortimer, "teetiny!"

"BOOM," said the cannons.



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This Mortimer. This product of *eros monogamus* was for once, simply a man. His Sandra who had also sniffed the glorious elixir, was for once simply a woman. Mortimer slept. Sandra slept. Randolph covered them. Leroy turned up the air conditioning.

"Security," said Randolph.

"Comfort," said Leroy.

"Time to charge our batteries," said Randolph.

"Whoopee," said Leroy.

"Why don't we charge on up to Chinese Yellow," said Randolph, "and surprise this honky when he wakes up?"

Leroy grinned, "Pidgeon English on!"

"Chicken chow mein!" yelled Randolph.

MORTIMER sat on the toilet. He was overcome. "Chinks!" Grinning Chinese Jones's. *Diarrhea.* Mortimer's bowels exploded—burned. "Yeow! Oh Pavlov! Oh Goebbels! Do I deserve this?"

Randolph and Leroy trooped in singing: *"Cheng hsin; cheng hsin; rectify your anxious heart, rectify your anxious heart; cheng hsin!"*

"Security," said Randolph.

"Comfort," said Leroy.

"Whew!" Mortimer staggered from the toilet.

"A note for you, Mr. Sternglass," said Leroy.

Mortimer took the crumbled letter: "meter reading $789.00—next appointment: 5 a.m.—Lake Eola Park—tommorrow morning—prepare for hospitalization—obey your officers—A. JONES."

Mortimer trembled. Mortimer knew fear. He looked at the orientals: ALDEBARAN—SECURITY & COMFORT. He must escape. He must find a real policeman. Mortimer dashed for the front door. Psst! Psst! Psss . . . He ran into the street; his organ stiff, his fears forgot.

"Well, you've done it now Randolph! You and your security. Couldn't you have used simple mace?"

"I meant—"

"We better call Jones. You've used *eros promiscuous.* No woman in this city is going to be safe."

"ARTHUR JONES speaking, Consultations and Arrangements."

"Sir," gulped Randolph, "Sternglass had eluded us. I'm afraid it's—"

"I'm aware," said Jones. "I have been getting transmissions. *Eros promiscuous,* a powerful stimulant! He's sure to go seeking sin, and Randolph, who is better acquainted with the haunts of sinners than your typical cab driver? That's why I always say, Cab driving *is* a profession! You and Leroy return to the cab stand and prepare for his admittance. I may have to use my *Descarte's Therapy.*"

*Deep South Hotel*
*Rooms $2.50—Cash Only*
*Not Responsible for Property*

MORTIMER signed the register—*Dr. Josef Goebbels.* He took his key, started away from the desk and stopped. "What sort of entertainment do you have here?"

"Entertainment, sir?"

"I was thinking in terms of a sextet."

"I'm afraid a *quartet* is the best we can offer at the moment."

"Fine," said Mortimer, "fine. Could you tell me when showtime is?"

"Within the hour and, I might add worth waitin' for, buddy."

JONES stopped at *Satan's Hobby Shop.* He stopped at hotels; motels; night clubs, notorious street corners. He monitored police calls; feared the very worst, telephoned Sandra every



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half hour, checked out secretaries at the Sternglass Complex, even dialed the morgue—*eros promiscuous* having previously provoked the strangest behavior.

At dusk, Jones admitted defeat. He even felt a bit tense in his tummy. He was glad he wouldn't have to admit this failure—very glad. He wouldn't be able to lift his head among the other cab drivers if this thing got out. *Descarte's Therapy* was definitely in order. This fare had always threatened to be terminal. He doubted he could find a more suitable therapy. Might as well go to the park and wait. Like all pharmaceutical wonders, *eros promiscuous* wears off.

THE BIG FOUNTAIN in Lake Eola sprayed brightly colored streams into the early morning darkness. Mortimer shook sensuously and compared himself favorably to the gushing, lighted waters. "All in the name of Dr. Josef Goebbels," he smiled. *Vindication!* Now, he must deal with Jones. He must have the secret. Then he'd get Sandra right where he wanted her. He'd see her cringe yet. He might even take to wearing his pop's tattered old sheets. How much should he offer Jones, he wondered, Half a million? Half of everything? Well, such things could be negotiated. Hallelujah *eros promiscuous!*

"Life's a frail thing, ain't it buddy?"

"What?" Mortimer looked into the yellowish cracked face of a man not much older than himself.

"I ain't no panhandler, but I could use a little help. See these calluses. I got enlarged liver and—"

"Sure?" Mortimer slurred and held out a handful of small change.

The man stared into it and spat. "Life's a frail thing, buddy! These here's honest calluses. Sometimes I could kill myself—jump right in that ol' lake and drown. I got bad dis—"

"Sure?" Mortimer took five dollars from his wallet and offered it.

The man spat into Lincoln's image. "Life's a frail thing, mister." And he hobbled away.

"Wait—I—"

"Morning! Mr. Sternglass," said Jones.

Mortimer smiled. "Well, Jones, we have business, don't we?"

"Something wrong with the meter reading, Mr. Sternglass? I noted your failure to pay Randolph. Let me state that the meter runs on the principle of the escalating tithe—ten times the previous amount. I hope you won't become dissatisfied with our rates and abandon us."

"No! To the contrary sir; I find your rates quite reasonable, considering your wares."

"Sternglass, you're not just another satisfied customer, are you? You're trying to deal with me; isn't that it? And if you are I must—"

"Oh no, sir! Deal? But you do know that insurance is my business and I could offer you a very enticing sum for your goods, as well as a policy, of course, against development of any community interest in your activities. You know about SOAP, don't you—the program to clean up drugs—*Sell Out A Pusher.* Any anonymous blackmailer or disgruntled fare—I believe you use the term, fare—anyone could cause difficulty for you and your assistants. My policy—my resources and local contacts could certainly—"

"Let's take a ride Mr. Sternglass, to—eh—consider your proposal."

Delight! Oh Dr.s! Jones must be squirming on the inside. Oh Pavlov, should I offer him a Tum? Goebbels, the Reichstag flames! *Confidence, assurance; Satan's Hobby Shop,* here I come.



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III. *Revelations: Cogito, Ergo Sum*

"WELL, Mr. Sternglass, our journey together is almost terminated."

Mortimer lit a cigar. "Yes it is, Jones, and I just want to say—"

Psst! Psst! Psss! Pss . . .

"Bringing in the sheaves, Randolph. He'll probably be flailing about and screaming by the time we arrive. Nothing's quite so potent as *Vertigo* and I've given him *no. 29!*"

"JUMP! Jump! Jump! Jump!" Mortimer hung desperately from a ledge atop the Sternglass Complex. Sandra lead the cheering. "Jump! Jump! Jump!"

"Retribution," screamed his dad.

"Jump! Jump! Jump! Jump!"

Jennie sat on the concrete, silent and scribbling. Captain waved his grown up sword. Annabell rended her garment. Morty dragged up smouldering ashes and sack cloth for them all. Sternglass employees picnicked. Old Cleggar danced a jig. "What a propaganda splash," cried Goebels. "Degenerate leaps from building! Victory is near. Support your Fuerher."

"Jump! Jump! Jump! Jump!"

"Ruff! Ruff! Ruff!" Pavlov howled and rushed about chalking ellipses on the street gradually altering the shape until one was a circle. "Hop scotch? Discriminating hop scotch? You can't piss in my ear and make me think it's raining. Ruff! Ruff! Ruff!"

"Experimental neuroses," Mortimer screamed and let go one hand.

"Jump! Jump! Jump! Jump!"

"Kimo Sabe," came the tender voice. The masked man reached out to him.

"First, I want to see your face; you're not Jones?"

He removed the mask and stared blankly. He yawned. "Life's a frail thing, ain't it buddy?"

Mortimer looked into the eyes; the cracked yellowish face of a man not much older than himself. He turned loose his grip and began the long fall.

"Jum . . ."

When you hit you're dead. *"Hi Yo Silver!"* The fall is endless.

"HAND ME the temporary *apathy*," said Jones. "He's coming around. Twenty-nine hours of *vertigo*—no one's ever taken that much. We're going to be able to utilize him though. Hustle Randolph! Get the implants ready. Arrange for the new uniforms. He's going to be quite useful. You three are going to be a trinity. We'll plant the *Chameleon* factor in his tummy. I can't wait to catch him craving soul food! Let's put the permanent *apathy* near his heart. And the *fear utilization converter*, well . . ."

"Right between the eyes," said Randolph.

"Great," said Leroy.

Mortimer opened his eyes. He began to yell incoherently and kick with all his might.

Pst . . . sss.

"This temporary *apapthy's* run out. We've got to get him under so he can sign this will before his handwriting changes. You and Leroy hold him. I'll get another can."

Psst! Psssssst! Pssssssss . . .

MORTIMER was conscious, conscious without consciousness. He had no memories. He recalled facts, but they were not *real* memories. "It must be a form of amnesia," he told himself. Everything is confronted but it is not. You remember but you don't. Things happen but they don't. "Do not disturb" gives way to "Nothing to disturb." Tears are not tears; laughter not laughter. Indifference is the goal; indifference!

"Oh Mortimer, sign please!"

(cont. on page 130)



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*This is a* new *Malzberg story.*

# RE-ENTRY

## BARRY N. MALZBERG

I

He knows that he has changed. He knows that he has changed on some significant level and yet, to be sure, he feels, physically at least, the same that he always has. Two arms, two legs, slight tightness around the left knee joint due to residual effects of combat injury and so on. His body in short seems to relate to itself much as it always has, in a kind of off-center uncongealed fashion but then again, they had made clear, it was the *emotions* that were supposed to be different. That was where the significant changes were to occur and of course they have; he knows that he is a different person or at least he is willing to proceed under the assumption that he is a different person. He trusts them. That is the absolute truth of his condition, fore and aft, he trusts them absolutely. If they say he will be different then he is different. "I feel different," he says. "That is to say, I feel differently." His diction, of which he has always been so proud, seems slurred, syntax comes uneasily to him. Still. Still. "I know I am a different person."

They look at him curously or perhaps it is only that they look at him without curiosity, the three of them at the far side of the room, shielded by table and receptors from his gaze which (he takes this to be) is firm and intense. He has always had a great deal of difficulty dealing with the scientific mind, the devices of technology, he guesses. He has never been able to figure these people out. Yet, curiously or incuriously they regard him calmly; he feels that he occupies their fullest attention. "Inside now," he says; "I know that I have the capacity for love."

"What is love?" one of them says.

"Intense devotion to one particular person in the romantic ideal. Of course there can be devotion to many people, to objects or even to ideas but in the conventional, romanticized fashion it becomes a fixation upon, perhaps I mean an idealization of an individual to the exclusion of other individuals and at the cost of severe alterations of one's mental state. One feels somehow both dependent upon and yet ennobled by the object of this kind of devotion. I feel it," he says, nodding at them solemnly. "I feel it now. I know that I have been given that capacity."

"Who do you feel it for?" one of them says. It might be the same one but then again it might be different. He has always had a great deal of difficulty making individuation of technologically-oriented types, that has been part of his problem compounded by the fact that the society itself is so technologically based. If it had been a romantic society or one which gave more value to the so-called occult or intuitive arts . . . well, not to think of that. You



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must deal with conditions as they are presented, you must deal with the world in which you live, that has been part of the process. "Who do you feel it for?" another of them says. "Are you having trouble hearing?"

"No," he says and touches an ear for emphasis. "My physical faculties seem to be in excellent condition. I don't know," he says, "I do not feel it for a specific person and yet I know that I have within myself the capacity to feel for a specific person. I feel that I must embark upon that search."

"When?"

"As soon as I am released," he says. "As soon as you tell me that I may go. I must change my life," he says, "I must come to terms with what I have been and what I am now and fuse them so that I may become." He bows his head, stands humbly before them. Although he is sincere it occurs to him, not without a little pride, that he never would have put the case so well before. Perhaps he is improving in all ways. His syntax was not bad after all; it was merely a little rusty. "I am in a process of becoming," he says.

II

IN ANOTHER ROOM he stands, somewhat nervous but essentially at ease until a woman enters. They have prepared him for this with little advisements and hints but they have left the essential development of the encounter to him. As is only proper. Time and again they have made clear to him that while certain essential changes can be made in the enzyme system, while the bio-mechanic balance can be altered for changed feedback, while the hypothalmus can be jiggled and the thyroid cracked the way in which these changed forces are brought to bear will rest within him. The integrity of the human soul, after all, is absolute as the literature and orientation sessions have made clear. She is a reasonably attractive woman in, he supposes, her late thirties although then again she might be somewhat older than that or even younger; the light casts strange fluorescence across her face and then he has always been hesifant in making judgements on ages. For that matter he is not too strong on faces either. She seems however to be a thoroughly acceptable woman in all ways; he has to admit that. She closes the door behind her, crosses her legs, leans against the wall. He may see appraisal in her stare but then again it may only be admiration. "Hello," he says. It is important to make the first statement he has been told, and thus control the pace of the interview. "How are you?"

She shakes her head. "We have no time for that," she says. "Do you love me?"

*He* was supposed to control the pace of the interview, he had thought. "I don't know," he says, "do you love *me*?"

"That is not the important thing," she says. "I am object—you are subject. It is your life we are talking about; it is your condition. Do you love me?" Her voice he would like to think carries passion but he doubts it. He senses urgency and under that the whine of the machine. Perhaps that is the explanation. Perhaps she is a machine. For that matter perhaps *he* is a machine. For all that he knows the orientation and pamphlets may be a lie and they may have converted him into a walking prosthesis, simulacrum of himself. He would not put this beyond them. "I said, do you love me?"

He sighs, tries to come to terms



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with the situation. "I have the capacity to love now," he says, "I know that—"

"That is not the question you have been asked. The question is, do you love me?"

"I find you desireable," he says, "I certainly find you interesting. I think in many ways—"

"Be precise. Answer my question. Do you love me?" Her eyes, he sees, will take no more dissemblance. "That is what I am here to learn."

"Ah," he says. "Oh." He pauses. It is important to get this right. It is important to get this right because, after all, this is not only his new personna but the results of the project itself which are at issue. "No," he says, "no, I can't say that I love you."

"Then I hate you," she says and turns and opens the door and leaves the room. Cross-legged, he allows himself to sink, amazed, to the floor. No one had told him that they would deal like this.

III

ANOTHER WOMAN comes into the room presently or perhaps it is the same one in somewhat different garb and cosmetics. They are sensible, technologically-oriented people here well trained in the ways and means of the carefully nurtured, carefully administered project: they would not deal in superfluities here and the budget would, perhaps, force them to keep to the minimum. "Hello," she says, "how are you?"

"I am all right," he says politely. "Have I met you before?"

"No time for any of that. How do you feel for me?"

"Well," he says, "well, the question might better be phrased, how do you feel—"

She raises a sensible palm, buts him off. "No," she says, "I told you, we have no time for that. "How do you feel for me? Do you love me?"

"If we could only talk a while."

"Or is it merely a moderate passion, a quickening of interest say, a certain feeling of involvement—"

"I only came from the treatment a short while ago," he says, "surely the demands—"

"No time," she says, "we operate in a businesslike way here; we have no time to get off the subject. This is an economical, efficient system here and it must continue. Do you love me?"

He shakes his head. "I'm truly sorry," he says, "I'm afraid that I don't. I don't know you well enough—"

He would say more—he has, suddenly, a great deal to say—but she has already turned and left the room. This time he stands against the wall, pondering but actually phrasing very little.

IV

BY RULE OF THREE he would expect another woman or the same again to enter the room and put the question but this is a sensible, economic operation here run by sensible, technologically-oriented people and they apparently have decided that there is no necessity for the rule of three. Instead he finds himself escorted back to the room where the four of them sit behind lacquered panels and face him in, he believes, an accusatory fashion although they may merely be his new defensiveness. (He is certainly a lot sharper and more responsive to his feelings than he has ever been before. They would surely suspect the possibility that he could love although it is hard to arrive at definite judgements on love merely because of the occurrence of guilt.)



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He waits for them to say something but he sees presently that they are not; that they are, in fact, waiting for him to speak. "Did I fail?" he says. They say nothing. "Was that a test and did I fail?" he repeats. "I'm entitled to know that."

They look at him, still saying nothing. They are sensible people to be sure and running the operation in a highly successful fashion (95% cure rate says the literature and he would not dispute this) and surely he should respect them but nevertheless he feels a tickle of rage which may again only come from his heightened or deepened capacity to feel. "It's ridiculous if that's your test," he says. "I mean you give me absolutely no chance at all. How can I love someone who I've never been before, someone who I don't even know? That wouldn't be love, that would be a kind of madness. You're supposed to make people better here, not make them worse. That would be worse to me."

"How do you know?" one of them says, "how do you know what we're supposed to do with people here?"

Slowly he nods. He can see the point. He hardly, considering the emotional impoverishment and decay which took him here, has the right to render judgments upon anyone, much less those in whom he has put his trust and who have a 95% cure rate. "All right," he says, "all right then. I don't know. I apologize."

"This goes beyond apologies. You have shown a total misunderstanding."

"I'm sorry," he says. He feels like scuttling, like begging pardons. None of that. He will be as sensible as them. "I'll submit to your judgment."

"It's too late for any of that," another one of them says, "too late for submission, you should have thought of that before, you should have thought of that before you denied love," and then, oh my, they are on their feet, all four of them and he can individuate them very well just as (retrospectively) he can individuate the two women, decide exactly who is who and what was what but too late for any of this as they advance upon him and seeing then what they have made of him (but only with his full consent and only toward the necessary end) he wants to throw himself upon their mercy but there is no mercy of course, that quality appears nowhere in the programs and it is in that way that they come upon him and take him out of there to a different place where with many cries is impressed upon him the true and final stamp of love.

—Barry N. Malzberg

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Editorial (cont. from page 4)

have freedom, or you can have peace, but you cannot have both!"

I assume this hastily-thrown-together collection of jingoistic nonsense was intended to sound like the work of the Robert A. Heinlein we all knew and admired. It was in fact an insult to the convention and its attendees, and brought about the first occasion I can remember when a Worldcon Guest of Honor was booed. A shocking occasion. The decision to manipulate this Heinlein-simulacrum and its performance did the Kansas City committee no credit, and besmirched Heinlein's reputation to a considerable extent. The entire affair is to be regretted.

—Ted White



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*Steven Utley, who made his debut here last issue with "Ocean," returns with a short and whimsical look at the life of a hero—*

# IN BRIGHTEST DAY, IN DARKEST NIGHT

## STEVEN UTLEY

BARRY REFUSES to come into my room. He never did care for my collection. He stands in the doorway and speaks softly, soothingly, as though to a child. If only I could tell him.

"Earl," he says. "This is Barry," he says.

I know who he is, and I won't be patronized. I go back to my comic books, which I've arranged on the carpet around me. I have a whole room full of comic books, most of which are older than I am *Flash Comics, Boy Commandos, The Human Torch, Doll Man.* I open one of the brittle magazines at random and see Captain America in all his four-color glory, wading through a pack of rotund yellow men with buck teeth and thick glasses. A few pages over, the Sub-Mariner is ripping apart a German U-boat with his bare hands. Nazi sailors tumble out, scattering Lugers and monocles in every direction.

"Earl." Barry's being patient. It occurs to me that he may indeed care too much, and if that's the case, he will be a very bitter person by the time he's old. You have to be super if you expect to get by and not have your compassion for your fellow man turned inside out by all of the misery in the world.

"Earl," Barry says again. "What happened? *What happened, for God's sake?*"

He sounds agonized. It may only be (I tell myself) that he's in love with my wife. In either case, it's my duty to set his mind at ease. I have, after all, dedicated my powers to the betterment of humanity.

"Don't worry," I tell him. "Nothing happened, Barry. She ran out of the house crying, that's all."

I put Captain America and the Sub-Mariner away, then looked around at the garish covers on the floor. Ah, Sheena, Queen of the Jungle. Ah, Hawkman and Blue Beetle, Airboy and Fighting Yank. Where are you when I need you most? Must I do it all without help from you? Don't you remember how much misery there is in the world?

THE TELEPHONE is ringing. I brush past Barry and go to answer it. A woman at the other end of the connection begins delivering her spiel with all the sincerity of a high-school girl laboring through Ophelia's lines in the senior class' spring play.

I am, it seems, being offered a expenses-paid trip for two to wonder-



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ful Las Vegas, plus a two-hundred-dollar certificate book redeemable at certain local stores *and* a glossy color portrait of my family. Mine, all mine, if I'm able to correctly answer a question within thirty seconds. I let the woman chatter along without interruption. I know her game, but I'm curious to find out what her question is. Mine is the wisdom of Solomon.

"As everybody knows," she is saying, "Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy were assassinated. Now, the question is, which one of the following men was also assassinated while serving as President of the United States—James Garfield, Andrew Jackson or William McKinely?"

Which *one?* Aha, a fatal slip upon her part. They all make fatal slips eventually. "James Garfield," I answer. "*And* William McKinley."

"That is correct!" she tells me in a tinkly voice. "Now, if you'll just give me your name and address, our agent will come over with your certificate book and—"

"Oh, you needn't bother." I'm not interested in going to Las Vegas. I never accept rewards. "I only wanted to hear your question."

"Oh." I've stripped her gears. Nothing in her script to get her through this unforeseen development. *Little did she realize how easily I saw* through her diabodical plan to discover my secret identity. She makes some more noises over the phone. "Oh. Uh. Well. Are you, uh, *sure?*"

"Yes. Thank you." I ring off. Shazam. The World's Mightiest Mortal triumphs again.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED, Barry? My wife left me. I shed my light over the evil things, for they cannot stand the light, and she ran out of the house crying.


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And now Barry's gone, too. I turned aside his questions. I frustrated his efforts to learn too much. We crimefighters must have our secrets. Our calling cuts us off from the rest of humanity, makes intercouse with mere mortal men difficult and *sometimes impossible.*

So now Barry's gone, too, and I am able to get on with my great task of ridding this world of crime.

AND NOW I cloak myself in darkness. And now I make myself a creature of the night, a symbol that will strike terror in superstitious, cowardly hearts. And now, and now. . . .

There is so much misery in the world. It's going to be rough out there tonight.

—STEVEN UTLEY



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# THE FANTASTIC INTERVIEW:

## LIN CARTER

### Conducted by DARRELL SCHWEITZER

FANTASTIC: Would you describe how you got started in editing?

*Carter*: I wrote a book on Tolkein, and my agent gave it first to Ballentine, and to pad the book out, more or less, I decided to go into the point that *The Lord of The Rings* is not the first and only great fantasy quest novel ever written, and to discuss some of the others that were, and my own enthusiasm for the other examples of the genre must have communicated because my publishers at Ballentine called me in the next day and were talking about how they ought to print some of these, because they were making so much off Tolkein and they wanted to offer the same readers other things they haven't seen. And so the publishers made an offer and I accepted.

FANTASTIC: How did you start, when you found that you suddenly had the opportunity to edit and republish all the great works of fantasy ever written?

*Carter*: In the first place I am no longer in that position since the series has been terminated. When I was in that position, when the series first began, I felt a degree of heady euphoria which I give you leave to imagine for yourself. I could rediscover and reprint *anything* virtually, because I was the expert and the publisher was simply the enthusiast. So I began to think of Cabell, Dunsany, William Morris, George MacDonald, and my original list of books to reprint was about sixteen. So for months and years thereafter I maintained a list of books that I would have to go back and read again, and see, and try out, and I asked people for advice, and I eventually ended up with a list of several hundred. I never got to publish all of them but I got a substantial amount into press.

FANTASTIC: How did you overcome the problems inherent in the publishing of long novels by writers who were often unknown to the public?

*Carter*: The publishers felt that if they could make the readers understand that this was stuff like *The Lord of the Rings*, that the same readership, all those millions of college kids out there, would buy it, that they didn't have to do anything more than say, "This is like Tolkein." They found out that that wasn't true, that the readers liked Tolkein, A, very much, and anybody else, B, not that much, so they packaged the books in such a way as to remind people of *The Lord of The Rings*, and at the beginning, in the first year or two of the series, I picked the closest things I could find to the heroic quest, imaginary world novel of Tolkein. And



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then I began to get overconfident and went off into things like the lost race, and the mythological novel, and getting a little further away.

FANTASTIC: Which ones would you cite as being further away?

*Carter*: Well, *The Lost Continent* by Cutclyffe Hyne is a novel of ancient Atlantis and it's in the genre of the Atlantis novel rather than in the imaginary world quest novel like *The Well At The World's End* and *The Worm Ouroboros* and *The Lord of The Rings* itself. It's a good book but it's not that much like Tolkein.

So in direct ratio to how much it was like Tolkein it sold well. The Morris for example sold marvellous and is even in print still—having gone through several printings—but the other stuff didn't do as well. For example *Khaled* by F. Marion Crawford, a sort of an Arabian Nights fantasy novel was not anything like Tolkein. It was just a good fantasy novel, and it sold terribly. It sold 16,000 copies.

FANTASTIC: Why do you think it took so long for the public to discover these people? For example, I've met college students who are wildly enthusiastic about William Morris. They're not fans either, but just people who found him in paperback or in the library. Why aren't there more of them?

*Carter*: Until I revived him Morris was extremely difficult to find because the hardcovers of his works published in America were published in like 1901, 1899, and there was a span of three quarters of a century there in which the books were thrown away, junked, and they just don't turn up in the second hand stores. Most of the readers don't live in the metropolitan centers that have second hand stores. You can go through states like Kansas, I suspect, where there wouldn't be a single second hand book store in the entire state. Someone out in Kansas has to buy either new books or paperbacks. If he cares to dig into the history of English literature he can find the names of these authors, but unless he really puts himself out, and writes queries or sends around lists, or subscribes to lists, or travels to large cities he has no way in the world of acquiring books like this. You really have to live in and around New York or San Francisco, Philadelphia, or perhaps Chicago to be able to buy second-hand books outside of copies of *The Story of Dr. Wassle* and *The Uninvited*, hardcover best-sellers of the past which are always available and easy to find. I was fortunate enough to have been born in a town in Florida which happened to have the biggest second hand bookstore in the entire state, probably in the entire south and so even as a very young reader I had access to a world of books that you'd otherwise have to live in New York to have anything like. I got very much of a head start on most people my age in the field.

FANTASTIC: It might be important to point out here that the books are not revived because no one knows what they are, and no one knows them because they are not revived. When your series came out I found out who Cabell was.

*Carter*: One walks into a publisher, let's say, wanting to revive James Branch Cabell. The publisher will look at the reference book of the field, *Books In Print*. There's only one book by Cabell in print and that's the most famous one, and the publishers being a flock of sheep like movie makers will say, "Well if no one else is doing it it can't be very good. If it was any good all the other guys would



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be doing it." All they want to do is see what all the other guys are doing. It takes the rare innovator to come along and say "This is good in its own right and we've got to get out there and push it, and I have faith in it and let's do it."

And that's where something new gets in. In the case of Ballentine books Mr. and Mrs. Ballentine are science fiction and fantasy buffs. Mrs. Ballentine is particularly a fantasy buff. She had read those books which came into her hands and she liked what she read, but she's a business woman, an executive, and she couldn't exactly go around and hunt the stuff up. And so she was enthusiastic about my enthusiasm. I had an "in" there. I had already made a convert, as it were, to fantasy. If I had walked into any other publisher in the world I wouldn't have gotten past the receptionist.

FANTASTIC: Did you find it helpful that some of these writers had at least at one time been major literary figures?

*Carter*: Well it certainly didn't hurt. I tried in my introductions to tell who the authors were and why they were important, and this is usually a way of saying that he belonged to the same club as Robert Louis Stevenson and used to exchange letters with Rudyard Kipling and so on. And I also bolstered his importance if I could by finding any quotations about him by other writers, by newspapers, or by important critics. Anything like that helps because the author is essentially an unknown quality and if I can make him seem interesting or important I thought I could persuade a few more people to give him a try.

FANTASTIC: How do you account for the fact that someone like Dunsany or Cabell were at one time well known if not best-selling, now even most of the academic types do not know their names?

*Carter*: Dunsany was best known as a playwright, and he was best known as a playwright because he was one of the playwrights associated with the great Abbey Theatre in Dublin, which also produced Yeats and Synge and Lady Gregory and a number of playwrights whose style of playwriting, the Celtic Twilight, the Irish Renaissance, took the world by storm. It was something new. This day is long past. Cabell was important in the twenties because we were breaking out from under prohibition, we were breaking out of conservatism, we were breaking out of the anti-intellectual stupor which had gripped the country, and Cabell was one of the liberated intellects who blazed the trail. He would mock the flag, home, God, mother, The Bible, and apple pie. And there was a certain amount of readers who would be titillated by this, excited by this, who found it stimulating. He was attacked often enough and drastically enough to be headline news, and his day, however, passed because everybody else in America became as sophisticated and jaded as he was. And therefore he had nothing to offer them that shocked them. He had nothing to offer them—the erotic titilation in his books is so tame now that you could teach it in a junior high school without raising an eyebrow, except maybe in west Tennessee. But he was essentially a fabulist and a stylist. The market rate for prose style in any given time is lousy. There are so few people in any given country who are going to read somebody purely for his style that nobody can make a living at it, so you have to have something



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else. In Cabell's case he became notorious and sensational because they thought the books were prurient. The people who admire Cabell admire him not for the prurience but for the style, but there's not enough people like that, unfortunately.

FANTASTIC: Do you think he is read and admired today for his style or for his content?

*Carter*: I think he is remembered essentially as a stylist. I admire him as a stylist. I also like him as a storyteller, as a plain writer; I like the way his mind works. But I'm one of the rare ones. A lot of people can't read Cabell at all. They find him dull, oversophisticated and a bit of a phoney, but it's the same way with Dunsany who I think is essentially a stylist, not so much a storyteller, because the style alone could carry him through many stories that really had no plot, that really were just vignettes, impressions, but most people have poor or uneducated tastes in reading.

They like a good, cracking yarn. There's nothing wrong with that, but there are other things besides a good story. There's symbolism; there's characterisation; there's style; there's the content of the story itself. There is pure writing, and so many other factors there, but most people, as I said, have bad tastes. They subsist on the best seller list and the sensational novels.

FANTASTIC: When you talk about pure style in fantasy, I am reminded of something. I've had a very strange reaction with Dunsany. I've read his work very widely, including the stuff that is not reprinted, and some of it I find very unsatisfying, even though the style is still immaculate. This leads me to believe that there is something more to him than the style. I think it's the rapid and nimble invention, which is absent in some stories.

*Carter*: In Dunsany's case, yes. In Cabell it is pure style, because I have read every book and story by Cabell and I have enjoyed everything I have read in various degrees. I mean I love the way the man uses the English language. He could write on anything and he *has*, and I read the book *The St John's* which has to do with the river. [*Laughs*] Now with Dunsany the style is a transparent, crystaline style. It is not obtrusive. It is a gentle style. It is languid. It is not given to overwriting and to rhetoric and to verbal ornament. It is a pure flowing stream. When he gets away from what he does best, which is fantasy short stories, when he gets off into novels of everyday life in Ireland, he has not enough there to interest me, although I have read those. I'm not that interested in Ireland. So there's a difference between Cabell and Dunsany, and the one is mostly style and the other is content.

FANTASTIC: I find that Dunsany presents one with outrageous otherworldly images—

*Carter*: The invention, as you say. He was the greatest master of pure imaginative invention as far as the proliferacy of it. So much would be thrown away. Wonderful ideas and the germs of ideas. Like Jack Vance, he would toss them off by the buckets-full in a three thousand word short story, the sort of thing that anybody else would make a *novel* out of. So when you get away from imaginative invention and get into simple recording of life, of everyday life in Ireland or whatever, he has no way of using what is his greatest talent, and therefore it is less interesting to read. It really is, although you pursue it



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because there is always a turn of a phrase that will charm you.

FANTASTIC: He did one called *The Curse of The Wise Woman* in which he manages to make it feel like fantasy, as if something fantastic was lurking right under the surface. I think it's his best book. Have you ever read it?

*Carter*: Yeah, I read it thinking that at any moment it was going to go off into the twilight zone or into the edge of Elfland, and it didn't quite. However, it was close enough. *The Blessing of Pan* which has a fantastic element in it also borders so closely on the fantastic. The whole mood and atmosphere is pregnant with fantasy but never quite gives birth, you might say.

FANTASTIC: Can we draw a conclusion here about how to produce fantasy?

*Carter*: Well, you find what you can do best and stick to it, which is a secret not just for fantasy but for anything else. Obviously, for example, Sir James M. Barrie wrote best in *Peter Pan*, because everything else he wrote is about as extinct as the classics of Abyssinian literature. Unfortunately he only wrote two books about Peter Pan. A. Milne wrote everything from plays and novels and murder mysteries all the way down to *Winnie The Pooh*, but the only thing anyone seeks him out for is *Winnie the Pooh*. If he had had half a brain he would have simply continued writing Winnie the Pooh for the rest of his life. The same way with Doyle. Doyle's greatest creation was Sherlock Holmes, which bored Doyle stiff after a while, and he tried desperately to kill him off, to get rid of him, and go on to something else, like his ponderous, unreadible historical novels that were his life's work. But the only thing people wanted and still want from him, really, is Sherlock Holmes. Some writers are their own worst editor.

FANTASTIC: Isn't there also a problem of milking your original inspiration dry and spreading yourself out too thin?

*Carter*: Well that depends on your original inspiration. In some cases that's probably it. You exhaust the possibilities allowable. In my own novels I tend to work in a trilogy, a tetrology, and for an average imaginary world I can spin it out for four or five books and that's about it. Unless I have in the beginning decided the world is going to be so complicated and interesting I could write about it forever, but most people exhaust the amount of imaginative creation and the possibilities of the character. Look at a character like Sherlock Holmes. Imaginative invention is not there. You are simply doing it all over again. It's the way his mind works in the deductions that fascinates people. It's not the ingenuity of the plots, because some of the plots are really gyps, you know. Some of his clues are not there and so on.

FANTASTIC: What happens to one's artistic integrity along the way?

*Carter*: I think artistic integrity is in the eye of the beholder. Very few writers in the history of literature have been so wealthy that they didn't have to worry about making a living. Most writers work best when they have a full tummy, despite the legends of Keats and Chatterton, and most writers are perfectly happy and enjoy what they are doing if they are well remunerated for it, and therefore insulated against the worries of what am I going to do for Tuesday's rent. Now if you are too poor and harried, then you have to write what they're



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going to buy, and this can kill you as a writer, as an important writer of any kind.

But most are in between. Most people write to make a living but they are lucky enough to be able to write the sort of thing, the genre, or school of fiction that they're interested in. Some writers simply love writing for itself, like for example Isaac Asimov. Asimov will write you anything, a children's book, a paleantological textbook, a science fiction story, a movie script, simply because the process of writing itself fascinates him. This was also true of Dunsany, who would write anything and did, from murder mysteries to poetry, translations, essays, articles, criticism, reviews, autobiography. You know, he loved to write.

FANTASTIC: Do you think it's a good idea for a writer, in order to avoid prostituting his fiction, to bring in the money from journalism and the like?

*Carter*: No. I would counsel any writer starting out to get a good job. Get a nice white collar office job, filing papers or typing up letters. In my case I worked for many years in an advertising agency. This pays the bills. Then on weekends, in evenings and so forth you write what you want to and try to master your trade. And as it happened in my case and it happens in most, at some point you suddenly wake up and realise that you're making more money from what you're writing on weekends than what you're writing in the office every day. At this point if you have a little courage you throw over the job. Now sometimes it takes quite a few years to get this courage up. Jim Blish for example, worked in public relations until he was like fifty years old, and he finally decided to throw it over. He could have stopped and made a living on his own writing at any time. So I'd say get a good job so that you're comfortable, so you don't have to worry where the money is coming from. And then write what you really want to write and don't worry about making a sale, because you've got to first learn to love writing, to love the process of writing. And if you're worried about whether or not Fred Pohl is going to buy this you're going to be more influenced by what you know of Fred Pohl's taste in writing the story than what you want to do as a writer. And I think that's bad, because that's a bad habit. In some cases the writer is simply going to be a non-commercial writer of prose pastels or little vignettes and he will never make a living in his life at all. Therefore I'd say at least he can have the pleasure of writing the stuff. But don't worry too much about going into it as a professional. Allow professionalism to happen to you. And it's going to happen at will. Don't seek it out. Don't say this is an easy way to make a good living and I'm going to write and I'm going to be smart. This is what happened to Robert Silverberg. I'm going to be smart. I'm gonna write what they want. I don't care, I'm smarter than they are, and so on. Many years later when you got loads of dough you try and go back and write what you want and you find you don't want to write anything.

FANTASTIC: Silverberg somehow mastered that.

*Carter*: I don't think he did but some people do.

FANTASTIC: Well he turned it around and became a major writer rather than a Ziff-Davis hack.

*Carter*: I don't think he's a major writer either. I have nothing against him, but he took the wrong turn at the very beginning.



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FANTASTIC: Are you now completely satisfied with what you do, following your own advice?

*Carter*: I would like to be a better writer than I am, and one constantly tries to learn and improve. I like what I like and I'm writing the sort of thing that I like to write because it's the sort of thing that I like to read. Now there are other things that I like to read that are beyond my abilities as a writer. I would like to be able to write with Cabell's wit and polish and Cabell's sophistication. I would like to be able to write the sheer headlong pure storytelling of someone like Eddison, and I would like to be able to create character as easily and as interestingly as Fritz Leiber does. This is of course beyond one's control. But the kind of story I am writing with a few exceptions is what I would like to be writing. I'm pretty happy. There are a few things that I would like to do that I haven't yet been able to find a publisher for. I'd like to be able to go into children's fantasy writing, but I haven't been able to crack that. But no, I certainly don't feel that I'm prostituting myself. If I was prostituting myself I'd be writing science fiction. Now I write a science fiction novel occasionally when I really want to but I don't really have to. Somehow I can devote most of my time to writing fantasy and I can make a good living that way. I'm lucky.

FANTASTIC: One writer whom some people think is writing too fast is Mike Moorcock.

*Carter*: No I don't think it's too fast. He does turn them out pretty quickly but in his case the problem is that he doesn't really approve of heroic fantasy. However, that's all the publishers want to buy from him. He desperately tries to write his own New Wave science fiction and nobody wants to buy it, publish it, or read it. So he has to write fantasy, and when he does it he does it reluctantly with a grudge against it. I mean, I love what I'm doing. Whether anybody else does or not, I love the story I'm writing; I'm crazy about it, and I take the extra time it takes to throw in the imaginative invention. He just tries to carry it along.

FANTASTIC: I was reading his *The Bull and The Spear* recently and my reaction was, "This is beautiful. This is what *Lord of The Rings* would have read like if written in three weeks."

*Carter*: *The Lord of the Rings* was a labor of love, the man's lifetime dream, his lifetime work, really. And sure, at no point in the writing of *Lord of the Rings* did he ever think he'd find a publisher or make a buck off it. And he wasn't the least interested. He had a good job. He was a professor at Oxford. Moorcock has to live by his wits and make a buck where he can. And unfortunately for him he's not really allowed that much to write the sort of stuff he really wants to. His heroic fantasy I like, but I don't quite like it as much as I wish I did, and I don't like the downbeat, grim blackness of it. A certain element of that in a fantasy adventure story is important, but there's also humor, and there should also be whimsey and lightness and the quality of joy, which I find totally lacking in his heroic fantasy, and I miss it. It's a serious lack.

FANTASTIC: Do you find that in your own work you are limited in the amount of time you can put into one book, for commercial reasons? Could you do a multi-volume labor of love?

*Carter*: I am writing a multi-volume thing as a labor of love.

Unfortunately I can't find enough time to devote to it as I would like to,



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though I try to squeeze it in between novels I'm contracted for. This is *Khymyrium*, and I find that in any given year the amount of time I can spend on the thing is far less than I wish I could. And this does bother me. Now of course I've tackled something enormous here. Just writing a novel-length novel as a labor of love would not be that much of a problem and I've done that a few times. But anything this prodigious is a lifetime job and I do wish that I could do it. If Hollywood would give me the nod and give me tens of thousands in one lump I'd say 'I'm going to take six months and work on *Khymyrium*!' Of course this never happens. You can take a week here and a few days there, but then you've got to sit down and write that novel for Doubleday. But outside of that one case I can devote as much time as I wish, really, to anything I write and am entirely my own boss. There isn't anything which takes me a terribly long time to do except for a non-fiction book which takes an awfully long time.

FANTASTIC: Sometimes at least somebody is willing to back a writer for a major work. John Brunner is an example with *Stand On Zanzibar*.

*Carter*: You mean somebody put up the dough for him to live on?

FANTASTIC: I think somebody did. This enabled him to take time out from his regular work. Has anyone ever made you an offer like that?

*Carter*: That's an awfully rare thing. I've often thought, what a pity there aren't a few millionaire philanthropists who are fantasy buffs. I can think of a few starving writers out there who have word blocks and who could use a little tender loving care. I personally know of two other projects besides my own *Khymyrium* that could stand some financing, books people want to write but they know are not going to sell and which will take a long time to write, and they can't afford to do it. Avram Davidson has one.

FANTASTIC: Well to my understanding, what happened with *Stand On Zanzibar* was that they knew it *was* going to sell and they knew they *were* going to get their money back eventually.

*Carter*: Anything by Brunner is obviously going to sell. He's a very well respected writer.

FANTASTIC: Do you think that if somebody were to back you on the *Khymyrium* like that it would sell?

*Carter*: Well, the money would have to come in through the advertising and it would have to be a hardcover, and there would be a number of volumes. It's the sort of thing that would have to be given major advertising space, like in *Times* book review. You know, "Not since Tolkein," and then a big spread. The sales, well I have no idea. Who ever thought *Watership Down* would be a bestseller? Who thought that Tolkein would go through fourteen printings a year? You really can't predict. I would certainly hope, but it's a very non-commercial book. I am making no efforts to be commercial, and I am simply letting my artistic abilities take over. And if I want to have a monologue in the middle of a scene on the astrological system of this world for the space of forty thousand words I will simply do it. I am not making *any* commercial considerations. I have to trust my instincts as a writer. While I'm going to be verbose and slow paced, I think I'm going to have interesting characters. The major cast of characters at the current state of the plotting is three thousand and, I think, eleven. Three thousand eleven.



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FANTASTIC: How many of these are—?

*Carter*: These are major characters.

FANTASTIC: Three thousand major characters? How long is this to be? Are you writing the *Encyclopedia Britanica* of fantasy?

*Carter*: The novel will cover the period of a thousand years.

FANTASTIC: Isn't this sort of a series of mini-novels?

*Carter*: It is a series of everything, including biographical sketches, historical monographs, novels, folklore, legends, and myth. It is the mythological history of an imaginary world, and of one major empire of that world it follows the life of every emperor and empress and so on. Imagine the number of important characters in the history of Rome, for example.

FANTASTIC: Do you think it is possible to take sections of this, including novel-length sections, and sell them?

*Carter*: It'll probably be done in a number of novel length volumes. For example the whole first volume is the story of the founder of the empire, his entire life. That's obviously a novel length work, longer than the average paperback novel but under a hundred thousand words I should think. The second book could be made neatly into the lives of the first three kings after him, just before the beginning of the empire. After that I haven't worried that much about the structure. I know what's going to be in them but I don't know how long it's going to be. It will be a number of volumes with individual titles, as *The Lord of The Rings* is really one long book cut up in three parts and given individual titles.

FANTASTIC: Yours sounds more like a fantasy *Foundation Trilogy*.

*Carter*: No, mine is more like *Historia Regum Britanium* or Seutonius' *Twelve Caesars* or something like that. It's a work of history; it's not a work of fiction. It has footnotes and battle plans and photographs of artwork and artifacts. The structure is like, say, Brestig's *History of Egypt* with all the plates. Except it has more narrative. It has dialogue and such. It's a literary work but it's essentially history told as literature. There's a long introduction telling that this particular art form was unique to *Khymyrium*.

FANTASTIC: Couldn't you write "historical" novels based on this?

*Carter*: As I say, I'm not trying to be commercial. This is a labor of love. I want to do something that's never been done before and I don't want to cheapen it by making it a series of novels. I write series of novels, but this I am writing purely because I want to. I'm not even thinking of getting the thing published. It's the last thought in my mind. I'm worried about creating it first. If I start thinking about getting it published then I'm going to undercut my vision. I'm going to say well, all right, I've got this entire book of herbal medicine and that's non-commercial so I should throw it out. If I start thinking about selling this thing then I'm just going to turn it into another series of novels like the ones I do. Maybe with a little more prose style, but this is not what I want. It has to be all the way or nothing, and if it's not published until after I'm dead and gone, that's of no importance.

FANTASTIC: Writing is a form of communication and to do that you've got to have a reader. How can you invest that much time and effort into something which will not be read? Why don't you just keep it in your head?



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*Carter*: Well most of it is in my head. I have about a thousand pages of notes and I have manuscripts and drafts and revisions and so on, but most of it is in my head. I'm constantly turning over ideas. Like just recently I decided something. I have the problem of what are they going to ride around on. Since this is a different world entirely they don't have horses. Now it's easy enough to say, okay you've got a horse that's orange or a horse that's red, but that's the easy available thing. I'm thinking now that they are riding around on a form of domesticated deer or stag, which are quadrupeds, which can be domesticated. We've never bothered to because we have horses. This is a world without horses, so you have branched antlers and that sort of thing. Now this I'm turning around in my mind thinking about would they hang bells on the antlers, and at any given time walking down the street or doing my shopping or reading the mail, part of my mind is playing with this problem and going on to another problem like what am I going to do instead of having squirrels. But I can't really afford to take all this time, no. It's mostly in the head.

FANTASTIC: To what extent do you think a fantasy world should be an alternate version of the Earth?

*Carter*: Depends on the shape of the story, the kind of story is, whether it's a story about interesting people, or a story with an interesting plot or a story that is simply a heroic quest guided-tour kind of thing. If it's a guided tour of the world sort of thing, like *The Lord of The Rings* is, the world itself is more important than the plot or the people, and if the world is interesting enough the story is good enough. If it's the story of a fascinating group of people the rest of the world does not need to be that much invented. It really depends on the story. As a reader I am always annoyed when you have a totally imaginary world that's not ancient Atlantis or the far future, and they talk about oak trees and horses and squirrels. This is common and it always bugs me. It bugs me when Fritz Leiber does it, even.

I think you really ought to make it all up and there's no reason why you shouldn't, because it's so goddamn much fun to do it. I've invented a dozen worlds so far and it's an intoxicating pleasure, a great toy.

FANTASTIC: Isn't Tolkein basically—?

*Carter*: No, Tolkein is right here on Earth, just before the last ice age or something like that, and he's got horses and squirrels and oak trees. I'd like to invent other kinds of trees. I'd like to invent other kinds of jewels. I'd like to invent other professions. For example there are professions unique to medieval Japan, which are similar to nothing in medieval Europe. That kind of invention. But if you're writing an action story, if you're just knocking off a sword & sorcery novel, you don't *need* all this. They gotta ride on something so you say they're riding on horses. It's all right.

FANTASTIC: It seems to me that you shouldn't try to rationalise a fantasy like *Lord of the Rings* and say it exists before the last ice age. Shouldn't something like this take place beyond time and space?

*Carter*: The author's job is to convince you that a fictional narrative is true, and he's got to convince you enough that you are concerned about what happens on the page. We all know a story is a story. The people aren't real, so why should we give a damn about what happens to them,



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why shouldn't we stop at page ten? We want to see how the story ends, but why? It's not real. So the author has to do everything he can to make his people and his world as real and as interesting, of course, as he can and one of the things he can do is to make his people behave as people really do. People are motivated in their behavior. They just don't say, "I am the hero of this story so I am going to be invulnerable and all courageous." People just are not like that. Heroes are made, not born. A guy is stuck in a tough spot and has to fight to get out. Or a guy is being chased and has to run and survive, and so on. So, you motivate, and when you're dealing with an imaginary world you have to make it as real as you can, because it is imaginary. Now when you're writing a historical novel of ancient Rome you can presuppose that your readers know an awful lot about Rome, what it was like. They know what a toga looks like. All you have to do is say, "He wore a white toga." You don't even have to describe. But when you're making up the costume, when he's wearing a white *shmidlak*, you really have to indicate somehow what it looks like, you see. So in a fantasy you have to put in realistic details. It's not enough to say a dragon is in the scene, you've got to describe the dragon. For example, I've always thought dragons probably have a peculiar smell, partly the musty stench of a nest of snakes and partly the whiff of sulphur. And you have to describe this very characteristic and repulsive smell a dragon has. I suspect that dragons belch and break wind constantly, with all this fire breathing, all the vapor churning around. Don't just say, "The dragon came in"—describe the animal as if they've never seen it before, because they haven't.

FANTASTIC: Somehow Dunsany got away with saying the dragon came in.

*Carter*: Dunsany was not writing novels. Dunsany was telling you legends, and with legends there's an otherworldly mistiness to it. However Dunsany knew how to spot details. He would say "It's a beautiful city", and he would describe one detail of the city which allows the gifted reader to imagine the rest for himself. He would say, "The roofs were of jasper." That's all you would have to say. Describing a monster he would say, "The bridge to the city was carved out of one tusk of the fabulous so-and-so." He doesn't have to describe the beast, and he leaves it to your imagination. If Golden Gate Bridge is made from one tusk of the critter you picture in your mind what the rest of it was like. Now unless you are a good enough artist to be able to pick the relevant detail to be mentioned, you simply have to do the other thing and that is to describe it like it was right there. Dunsany was a genius. Few of us are geniuses.

FANTASTIC: Damon Knight has an expression, "Call a rabbit a smerp." This is when you simply transpose everything on a one for one basis, and your setting has rabbits only you call them smerps. At what point does fantasy reach this?

*Carter*: What I'm trying to do—I'm not sure too many people have done this to any great extent—instead of having field mice for example; I have a small rodent in the fields, but they're blind, and they have huge cup-shaped ears with tendrils sensitive to sound in the ears, and they utter a supersonic squeal like a bat. And I call them the "skree", and I never call them field mice, but they are small, scuffling rodents. They are



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like field mice, but with a difference. I have, instead of using any of the mythological monsters, invented new mythological monsters. Mythological monsters are all composites, you know, and so I invented new composites. For example, I have the man-dragon, which is a man's head and a dragon's body, but it is bipedal. It has a dragon's habits but a man's intellect. Instead of a centaur, a man in front and a horse behind, how about a mantaur? A horse in front and a man behind. You invent; you just don't transpose.

FANTASTIC: Have you ever tried to invent an entirely new system, without any elements of earthly creatures? A completely new ecology?

*Carter*: That's the Hal Clement kind of science fiction where you design a planet from the gravity up. Not that complete. What I am doing is inventing new minerals, new jewels, a new kind of magic, a new kind of gods, a new kind of, well—critters like ghosts, demons, goblins, etc. I have other kinds of things. So that's pretty complete. I am also inventing new kinds of flowers. I have flying flowers, floating flowers, which I think is a pretty idea, and there is no reason why there couldn't be flowers floating about. It's a world for example in which the human characters are not all entirely that human. They can see two colors that we can't. They have three senses we don't, and they all have horns. All the mammals on my planet have horns.

FANTASTIC: This is in *Khymyrium*?

*Carter*: Yes. It's not just a novel: It's a world. Well Khymyrium is the name of the empire. The world is called Istradorpha, which means mother earth in the language of this planet. As far as inventing something other than mammilian life, that's a little beyond me. I have mentioned it to a few people that it might be possible to have a sword and sorcery novel in which the hero is not a human being, let's say a reptile man. Somebody in a fanzine did a story like that, just part one and never finished, and it begins with a battle scene, you know, Gurglax the wandering mercenary who happens to be a dragon man covered with scales, kills his opponent and then sits down and rips off his leg and starts eating it, as a dinosaur would. You know, he has a tail, and he doesn't have any external genitilia. He can't have hero-heroine stuff because reptiles don't mate like that. That's the way mammals mate. It would be an interesting thing but it's difficult to see if you could pull it off. I'd like to see somebody try it. It would involve an awful lot of understanding of how reptiles work. I'm not sure we know that much about the psychology and life-rhythm of a reptile. You'd have to figure out some way to make reptiles intelligent because cold-blooded creatures can't be. They estivate every winter, you know. So, I think it could be done. Oh, you could have cat men, but that's just putting on fur. But a reptile, an intelligent reptile, with a civilisation, and a medieval type world. It would be fascinating. I'd love to see someone try it, someone who is really gifted.

FANTASTIC: Is this kind of rationalisation, such as how you get a cold-blooded animal to be intelligent, necessary in *fantasy*?

*Carter*: The more you can rationalise your fantasy, I think, the better it is, the stronger and more consistent it is. Just inventing isn't all that tough, but making it all hang together without just saying, "All right now, medieval Arabs" and just chang-



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ing all the names, changing a caftan to a shoogluck, that *is*. Now Andre Norton tries to create cultures using the methods of anthropology, trying to tinker together a culture that works, and she's not really that bad at it, but you have to rationalise fantasy to some extent. Obviously you have to have limitations on your magicians, or there isn't anything that can hurt them or anything that can stop them, and the world would be run by magicians in no time. So you have to have a system of magic that has built-in drawbacks. If you give the hero an enchanted sword it has to have a built-in drawback or it is simply a foregone conclusion that in every fight he's simply going to hack his way through. So you have to rationalise to some extent. Now I think that should be balanced by pure invention, just throwing in out of nowhere something which is never explained. A little touch, you know.

—conducted by
DARRELL SCHWEITZER

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The Apprentice (cont. from page 57)

the day!" Hedley tried to rise, but failed. "Why can't I move?"

"Hypnosis, dear boy," murmured the Baron. You are completely in my power now."

Hedley's eyes bulged with fright. He turned to Layton.

"You can't do this to me! My father will have your hide!"

"Dear boy," sighed the old man regretfully. "Your father *paid* me to see that things came to this. Seems as though he prefers your younger brother as heir to his estate." He bit off the end of a cigar and lit it. "Sorry, but I must keep my contract."

Hedley turned to the Baron. "But why did you have us destroy the Count, if you're just like him?"

"Let's just say the valley wasn't big enough for the both of us," answered the Baron. "Not enough fresh blood to go around. You might call it a blood feud!"

Layton rose and held out his hand to Heidi. "Well gentleman, and gentle vampire. I believe the young lady and I shall become better acquainted while you two sort out your relationship. I must get a little more life under my belt before I start reforming!" He winked at Heidi lecherously.

"No! No! I don't believe this!" screamed Hedley, thrashing about helplessly.

Layton turned and pointed at him with the lighted end of his cigar. "Believe what you like, but I strongly suggest you start believing in God, before the Baron sets to work. You'll give him time for that, won't you, old fellow?"

"Of course!" The Baron chuckled gleefully. He looked at the girl, an eyebrow raised. "You will take *good* care of Mr. Layton, *won't* you, my dear?"

"Oh yes, my Lord," she giggled. As she eyed Colin Layton, who was obviously very pleased with himself, a hint of secret smile moved a corner of her mouth, revealing a disturbing length of canine. "You may be sure that I will take the very *best* care of our honored guest."

And for years afterward, the peasents who lived just outside the valley talked of that dreadful, storm-ridden night when the screams that drifted down from Castle Köln were almost in harmony.

—DAVE BISCHOFF



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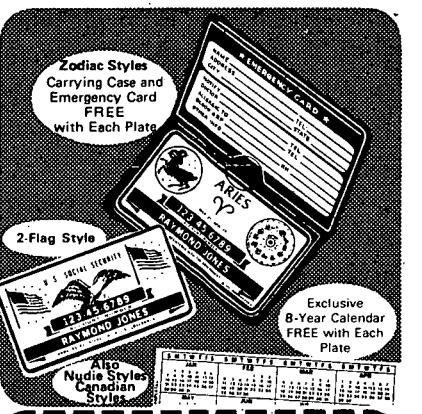


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# fantasy books

## reviewed by Fritz Leiber

ILLUMINATUS, PART I, THE EYE IN THE PYRAMID, by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson, Dell, 1975, $1.50, 304 pages

When I was young, the weird and wonderful were hard to come by. We didn't have literate paperback books or Social Security, either. Witchcraft was an ethnic superstition (and we didn't use that word that way then) which turned up in low-brow articles in *The American Weekly* and sensational stories in the garish pulp *Weird Tales* period. An aesthetic taste for it was uncommon and when on rare occasions it surfaced fairly well researched in John Dickson Carr's detective stories *The Burning Court* and *The Crooked Hinge*, that was cause for rejoicing.

The whole occult was pretty low-brow stuff, for that matter. Reputable psychologists were very dubious about hypnotism and psychoanalysis, let alone mental telepathy (esp and psi were still to come). Drugs were remote and disreputable, though bootleg liquor and Prohibition were matters of concern, and we didn't even have words like psychedelic.

Now witchcraft books are a dime a dozen—in quantity (and often quality too), not price. Witchcraft itself is dignified as biofeedback and an historic witch cult extending into modern times is taken for granted by almost everyone but the scholarly and skeptical, who are on the defensive these days. Same goes for all the occult. It's become fashionable to question in a loose and easy, highly emotional, *un*closely reasoned way anything labeled "Establishment" or simply "science."

Of course, this rise to glory of the irrational has sometimes involved a parallel deterioration. Dr. Gerald Gardner's witchcraft museum, begun so bravely on the Isle of Man, is now a feature of San Francisco's tourist trap, Fisherman's Wharf.

But the general effect is as if a giant cornucopia had been tilted, indiscriminately dumping everything that's weird and wonderful and rare within easy reach of everybody—a triumph of democracy.

Exactly the same can be said of this book, which has clearly been written on the principle of "If it's weirdo, put it in," as reflected even in the title of its Book One: *Verwirrung* (confusion). And it constitutes a vast treasury of crackpottery, you better believe it—everything from numerology with an



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emphasis on 5 and 23 to the theory that the bank robber John Dillinger could walk through walls.

It takes off from the Illuminati, a short-lived and Masonically organized rationalistic society founded in Germany in 1776 by Adam Weishaupt, a professor at Ingolstadt, the name being thereafter picked up and used by any number of crackpot and mystic organizations (there's an "Order of the Illuminati" at an address a few blocks from where I'm writing this). In the book Weishaupt is imagined coming to America, successfully impersonating George Washington and getting the eye and pyramid on our dollar bill, and thereafter it just keeps on building, latching onto everything that can be made to sound conspiratorial, to and through Watergate and Nixon.

Naturally the bulk of the book has to consist of long conversations in which someone is expounding something amazing and very esoteric to someone else with either or both on drugs—"an experiment in applied schizophrenia," as one character describes it. Action scenes are monumental, at least in locale: Dealey Plaza and Chicago of the Democratic Convention of 1968—or else we're in a yellow submarine bound for Atlantis. And periodically there are sex scenes masterminded by high-IQ call girls with a taste for the oral and names such as Tarantella Serpentine.

The authors know their subjects surprisingly well, but mix accuracy with grotesque inventions and comic or merely silly distortions: the island of Fernando Poo instead of Po, names like Nkrumah Fubar (remember Fouled Up Beyond All Recognition?). Even Lovecraft and all his works are in it, as in "Dr. Henry Armitage, generally regarded as having gone somewhat bananas after too many years devoted to puzzling out the obscene metaphysics of the *Necronomicon*."

The publishers go along with this gag, billing the book as ". . . black humor . . . irresistibly ridiculous theater of the absurd . . ." but also as ". . . a bone-freezing blueprint of disaster to come?" It makes one think of the Shaver Myth done by smartass intellectuals. The reader is pretty equally fascinated and irritated. Not to be taken seriously.

WORLD WAR III, by John Stanley, Avon, 1976, $1.95

I sometimes wonder if I know what black humor really is and am equipped to enjoy it, though I've been accused more than once of writing it myself. I had that feeling while reading *The Eye in the Pyramid* and again when at the beginning of this book, the excruciating description of a napalm bombing of Chinese farmers by American airmen is followed by a scene in which chimpanzees trained as guerrilla fighters in the Mohave Desert wreak havoc on a detachment of the People's Liberation Army somewhere in the Middle Yangtze Plain.

"No, you couldn't get chimps to fight like that," I told myself. "Moreover, the author doesn't go into enough detail about their training and the medical and logistic problems involved to make it science-fictionally plausible."

I still hold by that, but reading on, I soon decided that it was sufficiently plausible for the purposes of black humor, especially when accompanied by material (with nice echoes of *Planet of the Apes* advertising) on the growing popularity of chimp violence



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on TV in the world of this book.

For this is unquestionably a novel in the grand tradition of *Catch* 22 and readers of Heller's book will like this one, if they can stomach its violence, which is gargantuan—wounds, agony, death—though never done purely for the sake of sadism. It is written, in fact, with a certain lumbering lunatic charm and an almost incredible doggedness—after all, its characters are mostly (apes excepted) dog soldiers.

They comprise several small bands wandering about a Chinese valley while they fight small actions in a war very like Vietnam. The Americans include Charlie Brown, who is perpetually listening to old radio shows on a mini-tape-player (the book is very good on how young soldiers *really* passed their time in Vietnam—what they did with their *minds*) and Ernest Youngman, who spends all his spare time writing war stories (here one inevitably suspects autobiographic touches) to be torn apart by wise old Sarge, who is trying to teach him how to write realistically with due attention to plot and human interest.

This is only one of the devices by which other wars and battles than those of WWIII are brought into the story. One way or another, we go through Iwo Jima, Mindanao, the Long March, Hitler's Bunker, Gettysburg, and even Bunker Hill. The wonder is we don't get to Austerlitz, Gaugamela, and Carchemish also.

Other characters include Ju-Chao, a Chinese veteran depicted with sympathy and humor; Louis, a Greek restauranteur and dancer, whose specialty is lifting a table with his teeth and who seems a more purely black-humor creation; Reva and Li Ming, improbably sexy females with redeeming eccentricities; and King Kong (sarge of apes, who else?).

I imagine many young Vietnam veterans have tried to write novels about it. John Stanley has succeeded by the unlikely device of making it half a dream of a war writer learning to write.

THE FORGOTTEN BEASTS OF ELD, by Patricia A. McKillip, Avon, 1974, $1.50, 208 pages

Sword and sorcery fiction has come a long way in recent years, as witness the smoothness with which this story is told. Title and simple first sentence are exemplary: "The wizard Heald coupled with a poor woman once, in the king's city of Mondor, and she bore him a son with one green eye and one black eye."

I cannot fault the materials of the book anywhere. Names do not jar or strain for strangeness, yet have witchery: Eldwold, Drede, Terbrec, Mithran. No affected archaisms of speech, but short Saxon words and poetic diction clear as that first sentence's or "He gleamed like water at night with link upon link of metal." Magic as taken for granted as dreams are, rather than dependent on weird or elaborate inventions. A generalized Celtic-Medieval atmosphere uncomplicated by ties with actual historic legendry. A narrative that moves with an almost hypnotically even pace.

And the opening situation is arresting. The girl Sybel, daughter and granddaughter of wizards, rules a desmene of magical beasts: the boar Cyrin, the dragon Gyld, the black swan Terleth, the lion Gules, the black cat Moriah, and the falcon Ter, and she seeks the fabulous bird Liralento to complete her menagerie. She knows nothing of men and other children, little even of people, only magic and



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beasts. But at once a handsome and battle-weary young warrior, Corin Sirle, brings her the foundling infant Tam to rear. Inclined at first to destroy them offhand, Sybel takes on the completely unfamiliar and uncongenial task.

Now this is a situation fraught with all sorts of feminist promise, but the discords and difficulties one hopes for don't develop. The story moves on like a dance. The magical beasts never lose their cool, but revolve as in a ballet, saying wise and cryptic things, and in the end Sybel is happily married to Corin Sirle and has found the Liralen close to home, where she least expected it.

I can only conclude that perfection is never quite enough, that a fantasy of this sort needs to be complicated, that it is benefited by clashes and eccentricities and sharp humors, even by the author playing favorites and indulging whims and that it almost requires ties with actual history and the raw feelings and problems of today.

Dangerous, two-edged advice! Certainly it is easier to keep order and create beautiful patterns in a closet kingdom than in the wide, wild world. And don't get me wrong: just as it is, this story is pleasant reading.

CRASH, by J. G. Ballard, Pinnacle Books, 1974, $1.25, 224 pages

I have a notion that quite a few science-fiction writers as they grow older tend to see the world in terms of mathematics of some sort. There may be even a hint of return to childhood in this, as I fancy an infant's awareness is much preoccupied with counting and ordering or arranging images in simple sets before he learns to talk. And any writer is to some degree an arranger or patterner of experience.

I don't insist on my notion, and that some writers should go that route is almost a statistical necessity, but it does seem to apply to Ballard. Some of his best earlier work had it: the ordered maze of huge atomic-test pens in "Terminal Beach," the cancerous freezing of the universe into patterns of rigid beauty in *The Crystal World*.

In *Crash* geometry is king and the working out of congruencies between cars and the sex act, especially as performed inside them while they are in shift motion—the lining up in angled patterns of shift levers and steering columns, arms and legs, fingers and thumbs, windshield-wipers and radiator ornaments, all the body's taut protuberances and angled orifices—a delirium of Euclidian eroticism.

The protagonist is Vaughan, a "hoodlum scientist," who is experimenting with all varieties of "auto sex" and photographing them whenever he can—car crashes are arranged and photographed by milleseconds as part of a legitimate study of accidents, though he also does roving freelance work, enlisting as helpers airport prostitutes, drug users, and crash-drunk race drivers. Gradually it becomes clear that he is planning his own death in a sex crash where he will ram a limousine containing Elizabeth Taylor—and here we see Ballard making mainstream use of all those experimental shorts he did, especially in *New Worlds*, about the planned assassinations of real public figures. Vaughan achieves his aim, though the actress escapes.

The chief scene is a flyover at a London airport, with cloverleafs and runways forming a kind of graph paper on which to plot the action.

Now it is clear enough that there is



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in our culture a sort of obsession with automobiles and a tie-up of them with sex that goes beyond the already outmoded use of the car as a bedroom on wheels. In films and on TV directors give us lengthy shots of automobiles in motion without dialogue or real action, confident that our attention will no more waver than an actual driver's would—and of course there are the films where the cars are for long sequences the chief actors, as *Bullitt*, *Vanishing Point*, and *Duel*, that 1971 TV movie by Richard Matheson in which a huge truck with a driver we never see tries endlessly to murder a smaller car—fitting foretaste of director Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*.

Young women and cars do seem to be the two images our advertising culture most seeks to ornament, glamorize, and give fine finishes. And there may well still be as much erotic activity in automobiles as Ballard takes for granted, performed for thrills, rather than done as a matter of expediency. Also, there is the suggestion of an acid trip in the endlessly repeated sparkling paths of cars and planes and lights and flies across the field of vision in this book.

My first impression was that in his search for congruencies between active genitalia and elements of automobile design Ballard was seeking to enforce rather than discover or demonstrate a reality. But on second thought it seems to me that he is seeking to satisfy a compulsion or an imperative to visualize and set down sex acts and deaths (by crash), frame by frame, millesecond by millesecond, in brightest light and fullest detail, in this "nightmarish marriage of sex and technology," as the book blurbs it.

—FRITZ LEIBER

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Miasmas—A Life Term (cont. from page 105)

Mortimer glanced at the will. Everything would go to Sandra, with the exceptions of $789,000.00 designated to A. JONES, CONSULTATIONS & ARRANGEMENTS.

"The escalating tithe," Mortimer grunted and smiled passively.

"Agreeable, Mr. Sternglass?"

"Yeah."

"Sign, please."

Mortimer wrote his name. He looked at the wall poster across from him:

*Cogito, Ergo Sum.*
*I think, therefore I am.*

"Em," said Mortimer, "yeah."

"Recline," said Jones. "Time for *Descarte's Therapy.*"

Mortimer laid back. Soon his last name had been completely phased out. He would never remember it. He would never want to. He fell asleep.

"This is going to be some of my best work," said Jones. And he proceeded.

MORTIMER woke up grinning. He stared at the big mirror that had been wheeled in. He grinned like JONES. He looked like JONES. He admired the green hue of his complexion. He tried to make out the letters on his new drab green uniform.

Randolph stepped forward: ALDEBARAN—SECURITY, COMFORT & FEAR.

"A top flight trinity," said Jones.

"Security," said Randolph.

"Comfort," said Leroy.

"Fear," said Mortimer.

—WILLIAM NABORS



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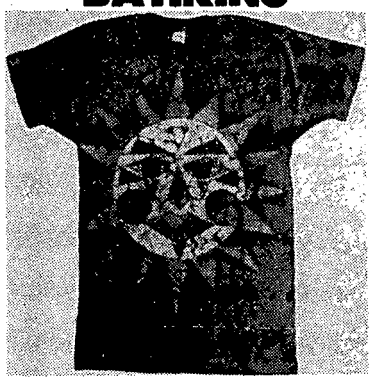

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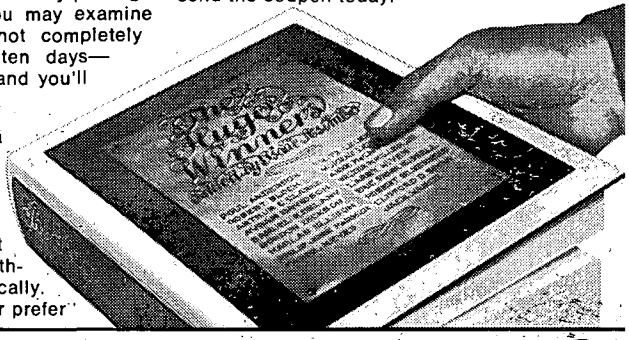


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